SHORT STORIES

No. 804. Week Ending May 28, 1904. Price One Penny.

The hand of Muriel Chalmers was at stake! From her hiding-place she saw the man she despised draw the ace of hearts swiftly from his sleeve.

An Exciting Incident in the Dramatic Story, "Playing With Hearts." See inside.

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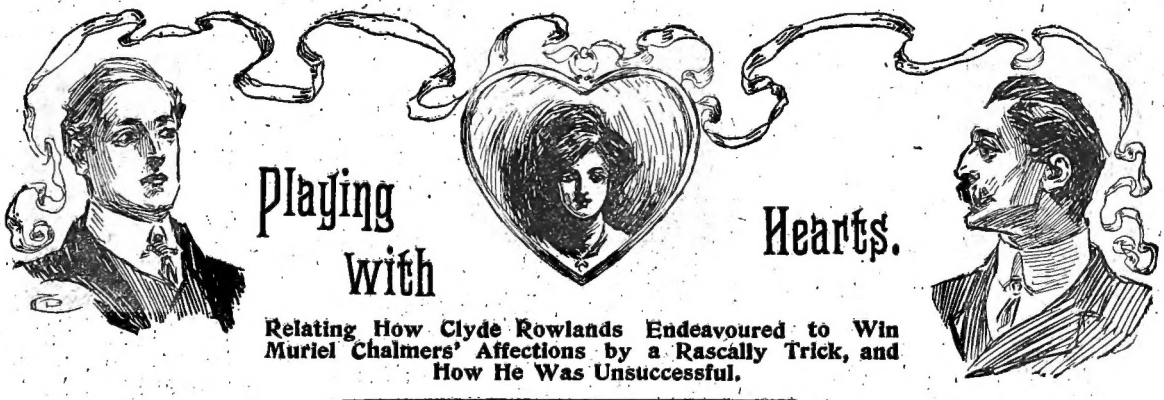
SHORT STORIES

No. 804.] For the Week Ending May 28th, 1904. [ONE PENNY.

Containing the incident depicted on the cover.



Playing with Hearts.

Relating How Clyde Rowlands Endeavoured to Win Muriel Chalmers' Affections by a Rascally Trick, and How He Was Unsuccessful.

"I SHALL not take your decision as final, Miss Chalmers!" said Clyde Rowlands, cleverly masking his feeling of baffled rage behind a suave smile. "A real prize usually requires a good deal of winning, so I must not be discouraged by a rebuff. I was too hasty—a pardonable error in the circumstances—and I ought to have waited, perhaps, till you had learnt to know me better!"

Muriel Chalmers experienced a sentiment of mingled sympathy and antipathy—a strange combination, but perfectly true. She was sorry for this man in his disappointment, and, at the same time, this speech had aroused a feeling of dislike.

"I hope, Mr. Rowlands, that you will accept my answer as final," she replied, in a halting manner. "I am sorry—so very sorry—that you—— Oh, please let us end this interview, which is as painful to me as it is to you," concluded the girl in evident distress.

"Pray do not be so distressed," he urged, bowing gallantly. "It is all my own seeking, and I am man enough to know how to take a temporary set-back. You see, I cannot regard it as defeat, in spite of the fact that appearances are against me."

With another bow, and a look in those keen, steel-grey eyes that made her feel uneasy for hours afterwards, Clyde Rowlands left her. There was something in that glance that fascinated her; it was like the gaze of a serpent at a dove!

Rowlands went for a long walk in the cool of the evening, he could not stay in the house another minute. He was generally calm, exasperatingly so, in all circumstances, but this refusal had upset him for a while

"A walk will restore me," he told himself. "And, as I usually think better when I am on the move, I shall probably be able to devise some plan for attaining my end. I swear that I will have Muriel Chalmers for my wife! I am passionately in love with that girl, and it matters not to me whether she loves me or not. I want the money, too, but I would have her if she had no money in prospect."

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He strode on for about half-a-mile before he recommenced his half-audible soliloquising. A cynical smile curved his lips.

"Of course, I know well enough that she is in love with Basil Ashton, and he loves her. Nothing definite has occurred yet, and I thought that her affection was that of mere association, a sort of friendship. This rebuff tells me the exact position. Well, I'll undertake to upset it. And I can begin this very night."

Returning to the house in which he was an honoured guest by reason of the fact that he had saved Muriel's father from a severe, if not a fatal, accident, he went to his room and eagerly examined a small basket into which he was accustomed to throw odds and ends of paper, torn letters, and the like. With a triumphant expression, he drew from it an envelope that had passed through the post. It was crumpled, and slightly torn at one corner. but sufficiently whole for his purpose; it was addressed to Basil Ashton, and the writing was that of a woman. As a matter-of-fact, it had contained a business letter, and the envelope had been written by a lady clerk.

"When I picked it up, I thought it might give me a clue to something," murmured Rowlands; "but I threw it in here afterwards as useless. I'm glad they haven't emptied that basket; this envelope will be very serviceable, I fancy."

He was busy till dinner-time. Immediately after dinner, he found himself alone with Basil; Muriel had left the gentlemen to smoke, but Mr. Chalmers had complained of a twinge of gout and had retired without the customary indulgence in a fragrant cigar.

"I say, Ashton, I'll ask you to excuse me this evening," said Rowlands, simulating with much effect the air of a man who has a secret and is trying to talk as if he hadn't. "I must put off that game of cards. I'm going for a stroll."

Basil laughed; it was a good-natured, frank expression of enjoyment, and just such a one as you would have expected after a look at the man.

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"You needn't look so mysterious about it, Rowlands. What if you have a chance of meeting a fair and lovely maiden," Basil observed jestingly. "You must be on the alert against the machinations of Cupid! These extensive grounds contain one or two spots that are distinctly dangerous from that point of view."

Rowlands stifled a chuckle; Basil was simply paving the way for him.

"Well," he observed hesitatingly, "I don't mind your chaff. I'll admit that you're on the right tack, but I hope you won't mention it. I am going to the Copse with her, but Mur—— she wouldn't like everyone to guess. You're so dreadfully 'cute. Excuse me now, won't you? You stroll that way yourself some evenings, so if you chance to see anything—— Oh, well, I don't suppose we shall mind *you!*"

He was gone before Basil could recover from his surprise, and he was quite satisfied with his work. He read Basil's face like a book, and he concluded that the bait had been taken.

"The plot is simple enough," muttered Clyde Rowlands, as he left the house quietly. "I'll make each one angry, jealous, mortified, and then, if I judge a woman's heart correctly, she will be ready to accept me. In order to insure absolute success, I shall place him before her as a dishonourable man, and I know that *that* will finish matters. Otherwise there might be explanations. Confound it, I must have her and the money. I'm afraid that demand received by this evening's post is too peremptory to be put off for long, and if I can't meet it, why, it spells ruin."

The plot may have been simple, but it required a villain to execute it; Clyde Rowlands, when driven to a corner, was villain enough for most things, and the besmirching of a man's good name was a bagatelle in his eyes.

Clyde Rowlands made his way towards the spot known as the Copse, with the assurance that Muriel Chalmers had gone on ahead and would be there when he arrived. He had arranged that by an artfully-ambiguous note of two lines, written in a style that resembled Basil's, and yet was not exactly like it. The note had been placed in a book that she had been reading, and Rowlands had made certain that she had seen it. He was right; he saw the figure of Muriel walking slowly among the trees in the gloaming.

She was surprised when she saw him; she had expected Basil. She still did not doubt that Basil had written the note, and she regarded the appearance of Rowlands as an unfortunate coincidence.

"It seems that the Copse has attractions for others besides myself," he remarked gallantly. "I am intensely poetic at heart, Miss Chalmers, although many people would smile if they heard me say so. Is it not Wordsworth, the poet of Nature, who has some exquisite lines on such a place as this?" And he rattled on, remaining by her side as she walked, and keeping up a flow of talk that entertained the girl in spite of her desire that he would leave her.

Thus it came about that Basil, perplexed by Rowlands' remark in the house, and moved by mystification and jealousy to betake himself to the Copse, saw the two apparently in earnest conversation, and turned on his heel with an angry exclamation. Rowlands' keen eyes had detected his approach, and he had skilfully engineered a turn in the walk that hid Basil from Muriel till the former had disappeared.

Rowlands left the girl two minutes later; she had wished to remain at the Copse for a while. But Basil came not; Rowlands had overtaken him, and they returned to the house together.

Muriel was mortified at Basil's conduct, and this prevented her from doing the most natural thing—asking him for an explanation. Had it been a matter of business, an explanation would have been demanded; but love is not business, and so a chasm began to open between the two. Muriel soon had something more to think about, for another part of the villainous scheme came into operation. She saw an opened letter, somewhat crumpled, lying right in her path on the following morning.

The envelope had been neatly slit, just as methodical Basil always did, but the letter had been replaced in the envelope in the narrow way, so that about one-third of the width of the note-paper was visible. Naturally, she surveyed it curiously, saw that it was addressed to Basil, and then caught sight of "Dearest Basil" on the exposed part of the note-paper. She did not see Clyde Rowlands surveying her with cruel eyes from behind a bush.

"Dearest Basil!" In a woman's hand, although Basil had not one solitary feminine friend except herself. And in the corner, Basil had scribbled in pencil "Copse, 9.30," just as he would do in ordinary matters. For a moment Muriel stood irresolute; should she read the letter or no? She loved Basil and had given her heart to him; she believed that his heart was going out to her, she had reason for believing so, yet—— Tormented by doubt, an aching pain making her feel faint, she decided that she had a right to know whether this man was playing her false. It was not fair, she realised, to pry into the contents of a letter not intended for her, but she argued that it was a justifiable act, and, to the delight of the scoundrel watching her every movement, she drew forth the letter and perused it.

She read an impassioned love missive; Clyde Rowlands knew what she was reading, for had he not written it? He saw the tears well to her eyes and her cheeks flush crimson, and then become deadly pale. Muriel stood gazing dully at the letter for a few seconds, and then she tore it all into shreds and scattered them over the bushes. Some of the pieces fell on Rowlands, and he shook them off with a sardonic smile as he stepped from his hiding-place and glanced in the direction in which Muriel had vanished.

"Very good!" he murmured, rubbing his hands softly; "*very* good! Fortune favours the daring! We are getting on! I must be nice and humble towards her! Her spirit will respond to kindness just now, and that is my chance! I'll bet that she goes to the Copse at the time mentioned, so I must have my confederate there, even if Basil Ashton doesn't turn up! I fancy he will go there, though; he will be irresistibly attracted, in the vague idea that he will see us again! Anyhow, Muriel will have her fears realised by seeing a woman there. Anyone could get over the boundary fence, or through it, so there's nothing extraordinary about his meeting a sweetheart within the grounds. When I am master here, I'll alter that!"

Later in the day a telegram came for Rowlands, and he turned deadly pale. He seated himself on the lounge in the smoking-room and reflected deeply.

"I'll do it!" he muttered at length. "I must have some money to-night, so I'll get Basil on for a game of cards. He won't go to the Copse, but I think that will be better, after all. I'll prepare the bogus sweetheart so that she can speak to Muriel and throw oil on the—no, not on the troubled waters, but on the fire!"

Old Mr. Chalmers was confined to his room, where he passed the day in trying to sleep and in growling at gout, doctors, and everything in general. It was thus easy for Muriel to slip away after the dinner, which was a much more silent affair than usual. She purposely announced her intention of not appearing again that night, and she imagined that Basil would hail this intention with secret joy. Rowlands was delighted; it meant that Muriel would fall into the trap, and that he would have Basil to himself.

"And I'll have him for enough to stave off the threatened steps!" he said under his breath. "I'll pay that old fiend of a money-lender for his threats, one day!" he added, with an expression that was not one of those which one puts in print. "But he'll keep it, if I do not respond, and the final upshot of it will be prison!"

Clyde Rowlands steadied himself by an effort; he generally had a wonderful control over himself, and he exerted it now. Basil, on the contrary, was full of disappointment and anger at the course of events. He blamed Muriel for her fickleness, mentally calling her an accomplished flirt. He was glad that he had found her out, yet he was angry that she should have proved herself so different from what his fancy had painted

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her! He was bitter against her, also, for having tried, as he supposed, to cover her fault by treating him haughtily during that day, thus preventing him from even attempting to upbraid her. Rowlands had secretly kept his wine-glass full during dinner, and Basil had drunk more than he was wont to do; and now his enemy plied him with drink and proposed a renewal of the friendly games at cards which had been interrupted during the stay at Mr. Chalmers' pretty country house.

"Let us play for a few shillings," he said, with a shrug of his shoulders; "this place is a trifle slow, and we want something to wake us up. Only playing for stakes will do that!"

Basil agreed recklessly. The first stakes were low, and Rowlands lost; he pretended to grow excited, the stakes were doubled and still further increased. Basil's luck changed; he lost and continued to lose. The stakes were constantly increased; occasionally he won, but he lost far more often. With flushed cheeks he played madly, and Rowlands grew even more calm. He was winning all round, and these two poor fools were as puppets in his hands! How was Muriel faring with the "sweetheart"? His thoughts wandered to the Copse, but he felt that his cause was in good hands and that he could afford to forget that part of his scheme for the time and devote his whole attention to this reckless gambler before him!

And how was it faring with Muriel? She had stolen out unobserved, and taken up a position in the Copse. It was spying, and she hated herself for it as soon as she found herself there. An inward struggle ensued; should she wait and confirm the duplicity of her lover? She clenched her slender fingers as the word crossed her mind. Lover? He did not love her, but—yes, she loved him! Even now, she loved him and she could not help it! Was it right, was it womanly, to spy upon him, in any circumstances?

"No, I will not!" she cried aloud.

She uttered a little cry of fear as she felt the touch of a finger on her shoulder at that very instant; she turned, expecting to see Basil, but she found herself face to face with a woman!

"Why are you here?" asked the newcomer, hissing the words like one who is in the throes of jealousy. "Who do you come to see? Have you come to try to take him from me? I tell you, Basil Ashton is my promised husband, and woe be to you if you try your wiles on him, to take him from me!"

She leant forward and peered into Muriel's face.

"Yes, you are the one!" she continued vehemently. "I know that you have been winning him from me, or doing your best that way! But I warn you!" She shook her fist at Muriel, who stepped back in horror mingled with disgust. "He has promised to come here to meet me, and I will make him answer for what he has done. He mustn't play fast and loose with me! Now you go!"

Muriel was stunned. This woman was very little older than herself; she was not vulgar, yet she was not of the same social standing as Basil and Muriel. Why was it that Muriel experienced this sentiment of abhorrence? She could just distinguish the woman's features in outline, and she judged that the face was rather a pretty one. Muriel conceded in her own mind that she had been unjust to the woman in shrinking from her; if the stranger were enraged, perhaps she had cause! Certainly, if Basil had pledged himself to her, she had cause for anger, for Basil had led Muriel by his actions to believe that her own love was returned in some degree! How dared he act thus when he had given himself to another?

"I beg your pardon!" said Muriel humbly and brokenly. "I will go away!"

Before the stranger could utter another word, Muriel was running swiftly through the trees, and was soon lost to sight.

When Rowlands and Basil rose from the card-table, Muriel was sobbing convulsively, her face buried in the pillow. Rowlands had lost some of his calmness and his cheeks showed a faint tinge of red; Basil was deadly pale, for the fact had come home to him with stunning force that in his foolishness he had lost a large sum of money. Basil went straight to his room and drew a cheque for an amount that almost exhausted his account, and this he immediately handed to Rowlands.

"I have my revenge to-morrow?" he said unsteadily.

Rowlands assented. As Basil went out, Rowlands murmured: "And you will lose again! To-morrow night, I will show you as a cheat! That will settle Muriel, for if she does not consent, I will coerce her by threatening to expose you!"

The following day, the small house party was practically broken up; Mr. Chalmers was still in his room, Muriel avoided the others, and in the afternoon went off to the village to do what she could for someone who had been knocked down by a motor, and the two men kept apart. Both Basil and Rowlands were waiting for the gamble at cards; at dinner they scarcely spoke, although they had it to themselves. Muriel had not returned.

On the previous evening Rowlands had manipulated the cards; this evening he intended to let Basil have a short run of wins on the low stakes, and then charge him with cheating. The difficulty would be to prove it if Basil protested, but Rowlands evolved a line of action which, he imagined, would cause disinterested persons to attach more importance to his word than to Basil's.

He carried out his plan at the psychological moment. "I wish I could have engineered a witness, but it was too risky!" he said to himself.

Unknown to him, there *was* a witness! Muriel, trembling with agitation, but determined, had crept in and stood watching behind a curtain. She realised the full significance of the position; they were, in reality, playing for the hand of the girl they loved, and Muriel, from her hiding-place, saw the villain swiftly draw the ace of hearts from his sleeve. A mist swept before her eyes; she did not see what immediately happened, but she knew enough. As Rowlands sprang to his feet, proclaiming in a loud voice that Basil had cheated by having two aces of hearts in the pack, turning his own misdeed against Basil, Muriel ran forward to protect her lover, the man whom Rowlands was seeking to ruin that he, and not his more fortunate rival, should obtain her hand!

"'Tis false, you villain!" she cried, her eyes afire and pointing an accusing finger at the scoundrel, who flinched under her gaze. "I know all! Your accomplice of last night was knocked down and fatally injured by a motor, and she has confessed to me! I saw you take that card from your own sleeve!"

"Then he robbed me last night!" gasped Basil, bewildered.

"Get out of my house, you fiend!" spluttered another voice, and old Chalmers hobbled in. "My daughter finds that you told your accomplice too much for your own safety. You forgot that people tell the truth when on their death beds, and death comes unexpectedly. What's this about cheating and about robbery last night?"

Basil hurriedly explained. Rowlands edged towards the door at the other end of the apartment. Mr. Chalmers went livid with rage.

"If you dare to present that cheque, you will be arrested!" he roared. "I'll have it stopped, and you won't get the money! Don't attempt to bluster, but get away while you're safe, or it may be the worse for you!"

Rowlands deemed it well to take the hint. He left the house just as he was. Chalmers turned to the two young people.

"If we had had any case on which to prosecute, I'd have prosecuted, but the actual legal evidence is too small. We shall never get properly to the bottom of this, but it is perfectly clear that he plotted to separate you and have Muriel for himself! Now, if you two are not foolish, you'll get married as soon as you can!"

And the best proof that this hint was also taken is found in the fact that a certain marriage was announced five weeks later!

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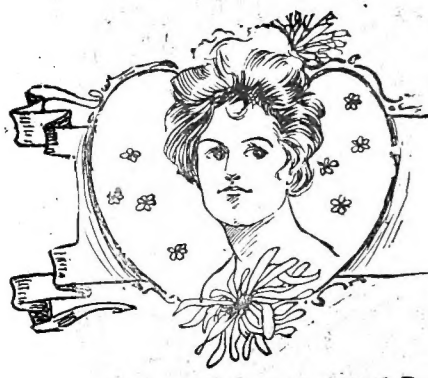

WITHOUT A HEART.

A Splendid Story relating how a Girl considered that Love was not an Essential Part of Life, but how she was convinced in the End.

"You are an awful little humbug, and you know it!"

So Kitty Seabright's tall brother, Murray, used sometimes to say to her when she had vexed him beyond control by her caprices, or he had watched her driving some one of her adorers, who chanced to be a friend of his own, to the verge of distraction by her coquetries.

"I am not!" Kitty would asseverate. "How can you be so cruel to a poor little thing like me? I wonder at you, I do indeed!"

Sometimes she would pout, sometimes go into a passion. Then Murray would sternly read her a lesson, which had no effect whatever. But more frequently the discussion ended by her coaxing him to forgive her.

One other person used occasionally, when she fretted and worried him beyond endurance, to bring the same accusation against Kitty. This was Roy Devereux, who had been her adorer, her victim, ever since she was a golden-haired fairy of six, and he a brave little knight of eleven.

But Roy's formula of condemnation differed slightly from that of his friend Murray.

"You are an awful little humbug, Kitty," he would say, "but you don't know it!"

"And I don't believe it either," Kitty would say, and generally forced him to repent his outburst, in metaphorical dust and ashes, before she forgave him.

Aunt Henderson never told her she was a humbug. That wise and worldly dame had carefully trained Kitty in the ways wherein a marriageable maiden should walk, who is expected to make what is called "a good match"—that is, marry wealth and position. And Kitty seemed to be going the way that her aunt wished.

In the ordinary affairs of life Kitty was gentle, loving, and honest. But when men were concerned, she displayed neither conscience nor heart. Murray said it was because she possessed neither. But Roy inclined to a more merciful opinion, excusing her on account of the vitiated atmosphere of Aunt Henderson's influence.

These two, Kitty's brother and her chief knight, were firm friends, though Murray was several years the elder, and had already begun to gain wealth, as well as win praise in the artistic career which his example, as well as personal longings and aspirations, had induced Roy to enter. This step mortally offended Devereux's old uncle, who had brought him up to be respectable and a broker, and he turned his back on the misguided youth accordingly.

The two men discussed Kitty with as much freedom as if she had been no relation to Murray, and the nearest approach they ever got to quarrels was when Murray's harsh judgment of the girl roused Roy to a passionate defence of the little Circe.

For bewitching Kitty was! She could even fascinate women, and when a pretty girl is able to do that one must admit there can be no limit to her powers. She was not a regular beauty; pick her features to bits, and you could find blemishes—inconsistencies as great as these were in her character, but somehow these very defects made her the prettier! Her complexion was purity itself; her great hazel eyes could express every shade of feeling, from fun to tenderness; her smiles were legion, and varied from heavenly sweetness to bewitching provocation; and her dimples—but there is no comparison for Kitty's dimples—they had to be seen to gain the slightest idea of their charm, and few men ever saw them, if free, and of an age to be inflammable, without growing enamoured to imbecility.

Aunt Henderson permitted her to amuse herself, but she kept careful watch. When any ineligible adorer threatened to prove dangerous, that wily lady artfully encouraged him to put his passion into words, and then Kitty sent him to the right-about. "Because you know, aunty, there is no fun at all when they get maudlin," said Kitty.

She had not yet ended her first season "in Society," and she would not be eighteen for some months yet; but thanks to Aunt Henderson's care, she was as worldly as if she had been money-hunting for a decade; and thanks to certain naughty instincts of her own, as skilled in coquetry as a veteran flirt, long before she left the schoolroom.

Roy Devereux had been making love to her for so many years that she took it quite as a matter of course that he should do so. She missed him if he were absent, and was glad to see him come back; she liked to indulge in an approach to poetical dreams now and then, but they didn't mean anything.

Murray read her aright so far—Kitty was a humbug; but then Roy was right, too—Kitty did not know it. There was nobody whom she humbugged so successfully as she did herself, for under all her folly and her wickedness, Kitty had a heart, and if it awakened one day, when too late, there would be terrible misery.

Early in February Mr. Erastus Chillingford came back from Brazil after an absence of several years. He was sixty, though he did not look his age; a widower; rich as Crœsus; and a very handsome man.

He had two married daughters, and two sons, and he quarrelled incessantly with the whole brood. But people declared that Mr. Chillingford was in the right, for his children were an idle, extravagant lot, with the exception of the eldest son, who was a miser, and grudged every penny his father spent as if stolen from himself. And now he wanted to punish them! And the most effectual way of doing this was to marry!

Only two evenings after his return he met his old friend Mrs. Henderson, at a dinner-party, and they resumed at once their former familiar relations. He knew she was a woman to be trusted, and he confided his secret to her, though he did not mention his desire to revenge himself on his family. He talked about his loneliness, his empty home, and though he

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frankly admitted that for a man of his age to take a wife was usually a folly, he opined that in his particular case there were cogent reasons, which would not only excuse, but render his determination meritorious.

He had not seen Kitty half-a-dozen times since she was a child, and had forgotten her existence; but Mrs. Henderson's pulses beat fast with triumph as she listened to his confidence. Naturally, she held her peace, made only casual mention of her niece, and invited him to dine with her the next night, so that they could talk of old times, and discuss the future with more freedom.

He accepted the invitation, and appeared, looking such a stately cavalier in his scrupulously-correct evening dress, his luxuriant grey hair softening his stern-cut features, and instead of making him look old, taking away from his age, and brightening his black eyes, till the effect was rather as if his curly locks had been whitened with powder instead of years, that Mrs. Henderson felt he must prove satisfactory to Kitty in every way.

And while the two sat waiting in the carefully-subdued light of the library, till dinner should be announced, Kitty herself came floating in with her white robes trailing about her. She chanced to be in one of her quiet moods, and looked like a youthful Sybil, or an enchanted princess, or some other rare and marvellous creature far removed from the capabilities and petty charms of ordinary girlhood.

Mr. Chillingford did not lose his head. Aunt Henderson saw that. But she saw that Kitty was a new revelation to him, and to a man of sixty this means a great deal! He was an admirable conversationalist. His manners, without being stiff, were a happy contrast to those of the free and easy youth of our day; he descended to no compliments; but every word or glance was a delicate tribute of admiration; and Kitty was charmed.

The dinner proved delicious. Mr. Chillingford surpassed himself, and Kitty flashed into gaiety, and displayed half-a-dozen of her Protean guises, before ten o'clock came and Murray appeared to escort her to some reception at the house of a friend.

Many times after that Mr. Chillingford called.

Kitty was given no leisure for thought. She was hurried on down the perfumed atmosphere, until her head was in a whirl; her vanity was excited till it became for the time her most prominent characteristic; her love of power was gratified by her influence over this man, whom the world delighted to honour, whose manners and conversation were charming beyond anything she had ever known.

Then Murray and Roy discovered something of the truth, and poor Roy allowed his impulsiveness to get the better of his reason, and he flew to Kitty and upbraided her bitterly.

"You are the very embodiment of the Eastern myth of the fire-fly and the white moths!" cried he, so terribly in earnest that exaggerated speech came natural. "The moths are her lovers, and she sends them to bring her a light, and they burn their wings off and die!"

"I have no sympathy for their folly," said Kitty, setting her face as hard as a flint. Murray had just been lecturing her, and she was in her worst mood.

"I know you are only flirting—I know you never mean to marry him," cried Roy, quite beside himself. "Kitty—Kitty—you are breaking my heart! I have loved you all my life—you do care for me at bottom—I know you do—you cannot hlep it—you must!"

"We are the best friends in the world—always have been—oh, Roy, don't spoil it all by turning silly like the rest!" she answered, a little disturbed, she could not have told why, by his pleading. Something seemed to stir away down in the depths of her being; some chord responsive to his prayers. Some secret lying there seemed to awake, to be trying to make itself intelligible; but her ears were so dulled by the brazen ring of worldly noise, that she heard it only vaguely, and the language was unintelligible—unknown. Mrs. Henderson had trained her in many tongues, but she had so carefully smothered the creature's head under the swaddling bands of vanity and pride, that the girl did not even recognise its tones, when the stifled prisoner heard the voice of the enchanter, and strove to call in answer.

"Don't put me off. You can't. I have gone too far. I must speak!" cried Roy. "It is no new thing for you to hear. You have always known I loved you! Listen, Kitty. I have to go away, you know—abroad—oh, the time is coming very near! Let your heart speak. Give me your promise. It will only be a few years! I shall succeed. I shall be able to offer you a home—and love, too, for you do love me, Kitty!"

She began to feel indignant with his presumption. She caught at that sensation, in order to escape the kind of fright which that inexplicable inward tumult had roused.

"How dare you talk to me like this!" she exclaimed. "I have liked you, but I shall hate you if this goes on. You and Murray do nothing but make scenes! I have told you over and over again, I don't know what love means. I am incapable of it. I haven't what you call a heart. I've told you that, too! Oh, don't tease me, Roy, don't! It's a shame! You will make me cry, and then my eyes will get red, and I shall look horrid, and we are going to Mrs. Wentworth's ball, and I've such a lovely gown!"

He stared at her with eyes full of wrath and pain. Their anguish hurt her a little. Her own nonsensical talk hurt her also. But she meant it, every word, and her sorrow for him was only because he was her old friend. Of this she

Kitty ran to the piano, and dashed into an old Scottish melody.

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assured herself again and again, as she shivered under his glance.

"By Heaven!" he groaned. "Don't—don't make me believe you in earnest!"

"But I must," she said; "it's all true! Go away, Roy, and get your senses back, till we can be as we were in old times."

"You love me, Kitty. You can't deny it. You love me!"

Again something stirred away down beneath what she called her real self. Again that frightened sensation smote her, that vague consciousness, that though she had never learnt the tongue he spoke, something in her soul partially understood and tried restlessly to catch its full meaning.

"If you ever say that again, I will never speak to you as long as I live!" she exclaimed. But, angrily as she spoke, she was nearly crying. And he saw it.

He caught her two hands. He tried to draw her towards him. But she resisted, he pleading all the while.

"I shall not give you up," he said. "You shall not break my heart, nor your own; for if you sent me away, it would wake, some time, when too late, and teach you the truth. Kitty! Kitty! Let your real self speak. Promise me now. Once you have promised, I know nothing could induce you to break your word. Say that you will be my wife!"

She had a hasty, half-formed thought, that it was a pity Roy had not a fortune; then her fright and her anger rose higher. The dread that she should weep seemed in an instant to nerve her. She pulled her hands free; she ran to the piano; she dashed into the old Scottish melody of "Roy's Wife of Aldivalloch;" turned her head towards him with a cruel, smile, and half-said, half-sang:

"But her name it wasn't Kitty—no, no! her name was never that!"

Roy fairly staggered into a seat. For the moment it seemed to him that he hated her. Before he could speak, the door opened, and a maid entered, saying:

"If you please, miss, your aunt says, will you come into the drawing-room?—there are visitors, and she wants you."

Kitty sprang up, waved her hand to Roy, and ran out of the room. He sat for a few moments. Then he rose and left the house.

A week went slowly by. Again Roy found an opportunity to see Kitty alone. Again he annoyed, pained, and angered her. But Mrs. Henderson, finding that he was there, came to the rescue, and after Kitty had fled, the two had a battle royal, and Roy was forbidden to enter the house.

He wrote to Kitty, and she sent his letter back, having scribbled on the envelope:

"I have not read it—I hoped you meant to be sensible; when I found you did not, I stopped reading."

And so she had. The tender, passionate words disturbed her to read, in the same odd fashion they had done when his lips uttered them.

That night Roy left town. He stayed away for a fortnight. When he got back, and rushed to Murray's studio for news, Murray told him that Kitty was engaged to Mr. Chillingford. "The engagement," he said, "was publicly announced yesterday." Murray had quarrelled with his aunt, and tried to quarrel with the intended bridegroom. But his wrathful reproaches glanced off the polished armour which that gentleman wore, as a child's arrows might off a steel breastplate. Kitty herself he had formally disowned, cast off; patience and moderation had never been virtues possessed by any of the Seabrights. That night, as he watched his friend struggling through the awful hours, which must carry him on to the more unendurable new day, he could have found the heart to revile the girl outright; for he understood the capabilities of her character as no one else ever had. He knew that she was able to understand what she had done; that she remained wilfully deaf and blind.

Roy was really very ill for a week. But Seabright guarded him in his lodgings, and kept the fact of his return a secret; for he reflected that later it would be hard on the poor boy, if careless acquaintances discovered how completely the blow had prostrated him.

The marriage was to take place in a month. But before that time Murray and Roy would have crossed the sea. When Mrs. Henderson and Kitty heard that Murray would not come to the wedding they were both somewhat disturbed. "It would look odd," the elder lady said; and anything which looked odd was terrible in her eyes. She wrote a beseeching letter to her nephew. But he paid no attention to it. At last Kitty determined to try if a personal application would not soften Murray. He would scold her, she knew, and she hated to be scolded. Still she could not believe that any human being could resist her very long.

With her usual impulsiveness, Kitty acted upon her resolution as soon as it came into her head. She had to go out shopping, and took occasion to pass by her brother's lodgings. She ran lightly upstairs, putting on her most pensive expression of countenance, in order to subdue Murray's obduracy at the first glance.

The ante-chamber led into both rooms and studio, and the two rooms were connected by double doors. Kitty decided to enter the *salon*, and knock in order to give Murray warning of her presence, as she had often done in the days before her conduct brought trouble between them.

The curtains were drawn, the room in shadow. Kitty was near the studio door, when up from the sofa rose Roy Devereux, and confronted her, pale and gaunt, and changed, as if years, instead of a few weeks, had passed since they parted. He stood still and looked at her, but did not speak. Kitty was frightened and troubled, too. But she got her wits back quickly.

"How you startled me, Roy!" she exclaimed. "I didn't know you were in town. I almost thought you were a ghost."

She tried to laugh. But the merriment died on her lips, as she met the heart-broken reproach in his eyes and heard his answer.

"It is the ghost of the man whose life you have ruined," he said; "and you are only a ghost, too! The real Kitty, noble and honest, died when she stooped to falsehood—sold herself for gold!"

Kitty shivered from head to foot. The old terror came back. But, as usual, anger came also.

"I'm afraid you have been drinking, Roy," she said. "I'd be ashamed, if I were a man, to talk about any woman ruining my future."

"Don't you be afraid, Kitty!" he said, savagely. "You'll live to see what I can make of my life. You'll live to repent what you have made of yours."

"Is my brother in, Mr. Devereux?" she asked, loftily.

"Your brother is not in, Miss Seabright."

"Then I'll go," said Kitty. "Perhaps you will kindly tell him I called. Good morning."

She turned to flee. Roy started forward, caught her in a fierce embrace, and kissed her twice. Then he released her.

"Go!" he said. "Every time your husband touches his lips to yours, my kisses will burn you like fire, Kitty, for you loved me—you'll find it out some day."

Kitty rushed away. On the stairs she met her brother. She said not a word about what had happened, but held him fast, and pleaded with him to remain for her wedding.

"I'd rather go to your funeral," he said; and then Kitty sobbed piteously, till at last he took her in his arms, moaning: "Poor little girl! It's not all your fault. Come, we sha'n't meet often in this world, so we won't part enemies. Good-bye! I shall sail in three days."

The month passed. Murray and Roy had crossed the sea. Mrs. Henderson had been dazzled by the promised golden rain. Kitty was married.

I have no persecution, no cruelty, no hardness to record of her husband during the years which followed. Yet, from the first, under all his elaborate courtesy, his gentleness, his affectionate attentions, Kitty was made to feel that the hand which guided her every step was iron, that she must

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walk wherever it willed, else the velvet glove which covered it would be flung aside, and if she did not obey its slightest impulsion, she would be dragged ruthlessly along in the way it pointed.

She shut her eyes to the fact as much as she could, and Kitty had marvellous powers of self-deception. She was such an odd compound, too, that though wilful and headstrong, she could not help admiring the man who was able to make himself her master. Then, too, Mr. Chillingford was the most cultivated, the most intellectual person she had ever known intimately. His superiority was so manifest that to be admired by him was a triumph; and shallow and frivolous as her education had been, Kitty had real talents, and was capable of appreciating mental supremacy.

Her house was almost as luxurious as Aladdin's palace. Kitty's jewels might have been the envy of a queen. She was allowed every amusement. She could have the world at her feet. But the handsome face, so stern beneath its smiles, was always beside her; the iron hand never released its hold.

She could receive as much general attention from men as she pleased, but there must be no approach to flirting; no singling out one man for the recipient of her smiles! He did not tell her this in words; he seldom put his commands into speech; but she was made to feel this restriction, as she was made to feel all others, and rebellion was useless.

She tried it once, and three months' seclusion was the consequence. Yet he was so charming a companion all the while, that she could not hate him. Aunt Henderson attempted to interfere, and met with her reward.

"Keep by me, and we are friends," said Mr. Chillingford, with his iciest smile. "Oppose me, and you never enter my doors. I am your niece's master, and so far, I am yours."

Roy Devereux knelt at her feet and in another moment she burst into tears.

Kitty came back from her seclusion more quiet, older, but immensely improved. With her natural gifts, her mind, in companionship with her husband's, could not fail to grow, and he took every pains with her, and enjoyed his task. But she was not to become grave and lose her playful ways. He wanted to be amused, and she must amuse him.

"You are not so kittenish as you used to be," he said.

"Perhaps because I'm growing old," said she; and then she sighed to herself.

But she knew that he meant her to play at being a kitten if she was no longer one—and she had to do it! Wealth and luxury gradually lost their charm. They were so freely lavished, that satiety followed. Amusements no longer interested her, as they had done in more frivolous days; she was outgrowing the petty power of their spell. Life, brilliant as it was, looked cold and hard amid its glitter; yet what she needed to fill it, Kitty could not have told for a long, long while, but the knowledge came at length.

Her husband entered her room one day so softly that she did not hear him. She was nestled in an easy chair, vaguely dreaming. He drew her head back, and kissed her lips. For the first time Kitty remembered Roy's menace.

She did not love Roy. She hated him, for it was his doing that she had at last reached the truth which must embitter her existence! She knew what the lack was. The touch on hers of the lips of the husband whom she did not love had, at this moment, in some strange way, made her comprehend what life would have been with a man she had loved.

Eighteen months after her marriage Mr. Chillingford was seized with paralysis, which confined him to his chair. But his mind remained as vigorous as ever, his will as indomitable. From that time, for nearly two years, it is scarcely an exaggeration to assert that Kitty was never allowed to leave his presence. He removed into the country. He could take daily drives; he could read and study. But he lived on. And in every occupation Kitty must bear her part—must amuse him to the very best of her ability!

Life was sad and dreary, and she hated it. But she could not hate him. She learnt almost to hate money, for she saw in family quarrels, in the mercenary spirit of professed friends, how odious it could become.

She hated Roy Devereux, too, for the knowledge he had taught her never faded from her mind, and yet she never played a Scottish melody—and she had to do it often ("Roy's Wife," among them) for Mr. Chillingford was fond of the old tunes—without there rising before her eyes that scene with Devereux in the library.

Ah, it looked so far off, and yet so near, that day when in cruel mockery she had frenzied her lover's soul by her scornful chant—and she knew now—she knew that his wife's name might have been Kitty, had she only believed him when he told her that she had a heart, and she comprehended that the voice she had heard crying out, in a language she did not then understand, was her own heart beseeching to be heard.

But she never went beyond this reflection. Kitty was dead. Roy was dead! Mr. Chillingford's wife was alive, and a man called Roy Devereux was alive, too, far away over the seas, earning fame and fortune already. But he was not the Roy whom Kitty had known; he was an enemy, who loathed and despised Mrs. Chillingford.

Three years from the date of her marriage Kitty was a widow. The will could not be read for three months, because Mr. Chillingford had ordered that it was to be done in the presence of both his executors; and one of them was on the Continent and ill, and could not return for at least that time.

However, everybody knew that Kitty was mistress of the millions. Her husband had made no secret of his testament. When the will was opened at last, and proved to be in her favour, the eldest son determined to dispute it. But after

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taking the preliminary steps, Oscar Chillingford was obliged to go back to China, and the case was kept off by artful delays for a whole twelvemonth.

Mrs. Henderson lived with Kitty now, and Kitty had her millions! Already, into her seclusion, admirers forced themselves. Go where she might, they followed, and Kitty could not forget a speech an old friend made, unaware that she overheard it.

"It is now Mrs. Chillingford's turn to be hunted. She is a gold fish now, and all the sharks are after her. She is young enough and handsome enough to be loved—but it won't happen! Every good has its drawback. Kitty can never trust any more, and there isn't one living who wouldn't think more of the millions than of her, try as he might to forget them."

Money—money! It seemed to Kitty as if every creature who approached her, from Aunt Henderson to the slightest acquaintance, thought of nothing else—wanted nothing else—tricked her—deceived her. And it was almost the truth, for that is what gold brings!

A distant relative died, and left her three thousand pounds a year. Oh, how delightful it would be, Kitty thought, if she had this income, and nothing more! But for all that I don't think she would have given up her fortune.

The lawsuit was to begin at last. There were times when she longed to fling the property at her dead husband's children. But Oscar Chillingford had hinted at wrong conduct, doubtful mysteries on her part as to the making of the will; and Kitty was not a woman to shrink from having everything exposed and cleared up.

She was in London. It was early spring. An intimate friend persuaded her to go to her house one night. "There would be none but the family there," Kitty was told. And Kitty went, and found herself face to face with Roy Devereux, who had returned unexpectedly, that very day, and had come to visit his cousins.

He avoided speaking to Kitty. There were at least a dozen people in the rooms, all excited over his appearance, so it was easy enough to manage.

Such a changed Roy! So much older, graver; but so handsome, so noble-looking! And there he was, only the length of a room between Kitty and him, and yet as far away from her as if death and the grave had swept between. She realised this the instant his eyes met hers.

She could not go away. She could find no excuse. After awhile there was music; and under its cover Kitty moved away into another room, and Roy entered, not knowing she was there. When he saw her, he turned back. Her pride broke down then. She was not thinking of him as her former lover, only of the days when he had been her friend; their childish games upon the grass; the thousand and one trifles which linked their childish past.

"Won't you speak to me, Roy?" she cried out. "We used to be friends. Won't you speak?"

In spite of her sombre dress, her changed face, in that moment she looked more like the girlish Kitty than she had done for years. Her very attitude was unconsciously the same as that she used to assume when they had quarrelled and she wanted to be forgiven. But the resemblance only made him hard and cruel.

Again her tremulous voice cried:

"Won't you shake hands, Roy?"

"No!" he answered.

"I didn't think you could treat me so!" she sighed. (The very words she used to utter.) "I wonder you can hate me so, if you ever liked me—but you couldn't have done so—you couldn't!"

He strode up and stood before her, cold and white!

"I loved Kitty!" he said; "or what I thought was her! You are Mrs. Chillingford, and I don't know you."

"Oh, Roy—Roy!" she moaned. "And you don't even take the trouble to tell me about Murray."

"He is well—you hear from him."

"So seldom—and he never comes home," sighed Kitty. "Oh, Roy, won't you say anything—won't you try to be glad to see me?"

"Glad to see you?" he cried. "You broke my heart once. Do you want to see if you can't torture me again? Don't hope it. I am not the man you knew. You are dead to me—more, you never existed. If I wished, I could not care about you. I could not love you. I wouldn't marry you if you had the wealth of the world added to your millions."

Kitty rose. She was not angry. But she had got her self-control back—she was stately Mrs. Chillingford again.

"You are right," she said. "You are not the man I used to know, you are a stranger. Permit me to remind you that strangers, in civilised countries, do not speak to a lady in that way."

She reached the door.

"I beg your pardon!" he exclaimed—"I beg your pardon!"

Kitty received his words with a slight inclination of the head and passed on. She went home, and cried herself to sleep, as if she had been a girl still.

As for Roy, he rushed into a violent flirtation with a damsel who was his distant cousin and had pink eyelids, a proof that the young gentleman was not so indifferent to Kitty as he wished to believe.

Within the next fortnight they met quite often. Both were determined not to speak. But they always did. Sometimes Roy said bitter things. Sometimes Kitty was cold and haughty. Sometimes they forgot themselves, and talked about their childish days, and grew interested and pleasant, till some chance word brought them both back to consciousness, and they would part on worse terms than ever.

The weeks flew by. Roy still lingered, still saw Kitty occasionally. He learnt one thing—that he loved her yet, that he was a fool! She cared for him, though—she cared! But marry old Chillingford's millions, live on his money—never! Not if he had had a dozen hearts, and to leave Kitty again must break them all.

The suit dragged its slow length along. It got into court at last. Nothing had been spared Kitty. She was forced to give evidence herself. Oscar Chillingford's lawyer cross-examined her, tortured her till a fiend might have felt pity; but he had none, and Kitty never faltered once.

The last day of the trial came. Kitty had to go. Passing down a crowded street, her carriage was brought to a stop by a press of vehicles. She looked out, and saw Roy Devereux standing on the kerbstone, waiting for an opportunity to cross. He lifted his hat, and was turning away, when her white face suddenly moved him to compassion. He hurried up to the carriage. He took her hand.

"Poor Kitty!" he said, softly. "You pay dearly for it all—very dearly!"

Whiter she could not grow. But a strange light flashed into her eyes and illuminated her whole face. She held his hand fast. He looked at her in wonder.

"You are going away?" she asked.

"I sail to-morrow."

"We shall not meet again, Roy," she said. "Will you do me a favour—a very little one? You needn't be afraid to say 'yes.'"

"I do say it," he answered. "What do you want, Kitty?"

"Come into the court-room," she said. "The decision will be given to-day. You'll not be kept more than an hour."

He drew his hand from hers.

"A most singular request!" he said angrily.

"But you promised! Think, Roy, if it went against me," said Kitty. But she knew her triumph was sure.

"I will go," he said. She made a sign, inviting him to get into her carriage. "Thanks," he replied. "I prefer to walk."

The vehicle drove on. Kitty held a consultation with her chief lawyer, in one of the waiting-rooms. When he led her to her place in the court, she saw Roy Devereux sitting on a bench facing her.

The trial ended. Judgment was pronounced in Kitty's favour. Not only that, but the judge, in summing up the

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case, overwhelmed Oscar Chillingford with the contumely he merited for his conduct from first to last, and bestowed an eloquent tribute upon the defendant.

Friends were hurrying forward to congratulate Kitty. Roy Devereux rose to go, when he was stopped by Kitty's principal counsel getting on his feet, and requesting the attention of the court.

Amid a breathless silence, he stated that his client, knowing in advance that her just claims must be acknowledged, had confided to him a decision, which he was requested to announce then and there. It was, perhaps, a little out of place, regarded from one point of view; in another, it was eminently proper. Mrs. Chillingford had only resisted the ignoble attack upon her, because to have yielded to a compromise, or announce her intentions, would have given evil, suspicious tongues an opportunity of declaring that there had been grounds for the infamous insinuations levelled against her, and that she feared to face the contest.

Everything was clear now. Her vile accuser was shown in his true light. The fortune was Mrs. Chillingford's, as her husband had willed it should be—hers to keep—hers to give—and given it was to be, to the last penny. One half the amount would be divided between the two daughters and the younger son of her late husband; the rest would be placed in the hands of trustees, for the use and benefit of such charitable institutions and purposes as they might hereafter select.

Amid a still unbroken silence he led his client from the court, and as she disappeared, such a shout went up from the crowded room as those old walls had never heard before.

An hour afterwards Kitty was sitting in her boudoir, when the door opened. Supposing it to be a servant, she did not turn her head.

"Kitty, Kitty!"

Roy Devereux was kneeling at her feet.

"Roy!" she murmured.

Then she burst into tears.

"Can you forgive me?" he cried. "Oh, how noble a woman, how grand you are! How can I dare tell you that I love you? Not a moment during all these dreadful years has my love altered. Strive and battle as I might, it lived on. Can you forgive me, Kitty?"

"I can thank you," she answered, looking down into his face with a heavenly smile. "You always told me I had a heart, Roy—you have wakened it at last!"

F. L. Bowe.

THE TWO MISSES BONNEY.

Illustrating how all that Glitters is not Gold.

GERTRUDE BONNEY was pretty, and, as is the case with most pretty girls, she kept herself and everyone else always aware of that fact. Not that she was overbearing and proud, but in a hundred little ways she would remind one that Gertrude Bonney had lovely grey eyes, a straight nose, and a dimpled chin.

When Jack Willet first saw her at a ball he thought he had seen the prettiest woman in the world, and after an introduction had been managed, he proceeded to fall straightway in love with the pretty damsel. After meeting her at a number of social gatherings Mr. Willet called one afternoon.

"Miss Bonney was at home," the maid told him, and he was shown into a long, sunny reception-room. He found it already occupied. A tall young lady in a plain grey gown stood holding his card in her hand.

"Mr. Willet?" she said, in a sweet, low voice.

"I called to see Miss Bonney," replied Jack, fumbling with his gloves.

"I am Miss Bonney," answered the girl in grey, and the smile passed from her face. "You probably wish to see my sister, Miss Gertrude. I will send her to you." And she left the room.

"Is it possible," thought the young man, "that such a pretty girl as Miss Gertrude could have such a—ah—plain sister." And yet her voice was delicious. "Ah—good afternoon, Miss Bonney," as Gertrude Bonney tripped into the room, all smiles and blue muslin.

Mr. Willet called many times at the palatial residence of his divinity, but he never again saw the elder Miss Bonney. By this time he was in the deep waters of love, and as yet he had not contrived to whisper his devotion into the shell-like ear of Miss Gertrude, for with all her innocent glances and confiding ways the little beauty's head was set squarely upon her white shoulders, and she always avoided a confidential *tête-à-tête*. Thus the swift months slipped by, and the Bonneys prepared to move to their country residence. When this news reached Jack he determined to speak with Gertrude of his love for her.

He nervously moved about the dainty room awaiting her coming, and when he heard the swish of skirts outside the door he hurried forward to greet—Miss Rose Bonney.

She handed him a letter; it ran:

"MY DEAR MR. WILLET,—*You are such a good friend of mine that I tell you the good news first. To-morrow will witness the public announcement of my engagement to Mr. Horace Richards, to whom I have been engaged for the past six months. Won't you congratulate me? Trusting you will excuse me for not appearing this afternoon.—Yours sincerely,*

"GERTRUDE BONNEY."

With a groan the young man dropped his hand upon his arm, while dry sobs shook his frame.

"Mr. Willet!" The words were hardly more than a breath, yet they caused the young man to raise his head and look at the speaker.

And he had once called her plain! Her face was wondrously tender and her eyes bright with sympathy. The touch of her slim hand upon his arm sent a thrill of comfort to his soul.

"You must try to bear it, Mr. Willet. I know what Gertrude has written. Do not be too hard on her. She is so pretty, and has been spoilt."

"Forgive me," cried Jack contritely. "When one sees you one wonders how she could be so false." And he left the room.

A month later, business taking Mr. Willet to one of the most squalid localities of the city, he met Miss Rose Bonney coming out of a house, a small basket on her arm.

"Haven't you been away, Miss Bonney?" he inquired.

"Oh, no," replied the girl, brightly. "I could not leave my poor. They need me even more in the summer. And I do not accomplish half what I wish to. It is very hard for one working alone."

It seemed but natural after that that he should meet the elder Miss Bonney on many of her errands of mercy and much help he was to her, too.

Then came a day when he met her with a face expressing happiness and news.

"Miss Bonney," he said, as soon as politeness permitted, "I have unexpectedly come into a huge fortune. Rose, the infatuation which I thought I had for your sister was merely a passing fancy. The affection I hold for you is more than infatuation. It is true, manly love. Don't you think you could learn to love me a little, Rose?"

Whatever the girl's answer was it seemed to please the young man, for he remarked to his pipe late that night: "And I almost missed the real diamond in the glitter of the imagination."

Florence Kesterton.

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The Sealed Packet.

Telling How it Showed a Beautiful Girl the Character of Her Unworthy Lover.

"It was Catherine Rolfe. Yes, Woodbury, some day I intend to marry her."

"Whether she will or no, eh?"

Layton Mowbray coloured.

"Thank you for reminding me that the lady's lips have not yet said yes. But her eyes have said it, and repeated it, a hundred times; those magnificent eyes, for which kingdoms might well be lost!"

He put down his cigar and gazed thoughtfully up the street, whose gay monotony had been so recently broken by the costly sweep of Miss Rolfe's beautiful dress.

Miles Woodbury stifled a half-sigh and turned resolutely to the huge folio on anatomy—dry, and dull, and almost stupid, it seemed to him that day. He looked furtively at Mr. Mowbray, his professional eye taking in at a glance all the fine points of the man's physique. Mr. Mowbray was tall and well-formed, with dark brown hair and blue eyes, aristocratic features, and decidedly the air of a gentleman of fashion. The prestige of a millionaire father, and the ancient atmosphere of "one of the first families," in nowise detracted from his personal advantages.

Whatever had induced him to seek the acquaintance of the struggling young physician was one of the mysteries. They had been together at college—always on speaking terms, but nothing more; the son of a millionaire could have little fellowship with the poor student.

On obtaining his degree, Dr. Woodbury had located himself in London, and here he met again his former acquaintance, Mowbray. The latter was disposed to be friendly, and after awhile it became quite his fashion to drop into Woodbury's sanctum and while away an hour or two almost every day. He was a man of leisure, and after the excitement of the ball, the opera, the concert, had passed away, time hung heavily; and Woodbury was a good fellow—made an excellent listener—so he said to his friends when joked about his less worldly blessed friend.

Dr. Woodbury continued his study of the uninviting volume, and Mowbray, yawningly observing that it was going to rain, buttoned up his overcoat and sauntered away. Woodbury closed the door and drew from his pocket a knot of crimson velvet, studded with a single flash of jet. He looked at it a moment, touched it lightly with his lips, and dropped it upon the flame-red coal in the grate. Just then the door was pushed open and a pale young face, covered with a worn blue shawl, was put inside.

"I fear she is dying, sir! Oh, come quickly!" said the sweet voice of the little girl.

Woodbury started from the reverie in which he was buried to see the new comer.

"Who is dying, my child?"

"My sister Ethel, sir. She has been so bad all night, and baby has cried ever since he woke. Oh, dear, dear! What if Esther should die?"

She was crying softly, the tears falling over the pale cheeks and down on the soft, unbound hair, which the wind had thrown about her face.

The young physician put on his mackintosh—it was raining fast—and followed the guidance of the girl. She led him a long way through narrow streets, growing every moment narrower, and more filthy, until she paused at last in a dark street, into whose evil precincts the pure light of Heaven seemed ashamed to enter.

The room they entered was meagre and gloomy, and scantily furnished. If there had been a fire that day it had departed and left none of its warmth behind. The girl pointed to the still, white figure on the bed.

Woodbury went up and laid his fingers on the cold wrist, which gave back no throb to the touch. For a moment he thought she was dead.

She stirred slightly and half-unclosed her eyes with a moan of pain. Once she had been beautiful, and still she was young; but all that remained of her girlish loveliness was fast whitening into the snowy shadow and mist of death. The golden hair—once the pride and glory of her young beauty—lay in a wild mass of rippling gold on the pillow; the dark lashes of the eyes touched a cheek as destitute of glow as the heart of a marble tombstone. By her side, half-reclining on her breast, its great blue eyes fastened on her face, was a child perhaps two years old; its crimson cheeks and lips contrasting almost fearfully with the dead white of that other face so very near.

"Mamma, mamma," it kept moaning. "Mamma, mamma!"

"Will she die, doctor? My Esther, will she die?" asked the little girl, drawing close to Woodbury's side. He put his arm round her in silent pity, but the eager eyes, expressing so much of hope, forced him to reply:

"My child, your sister will be with God before the dawn of another day. How long has she been ill?"

The sweet, anxious face of the girl grew deadly pale, but she was calm—the serenity of confirmed doubt; she knew she was soon to be sisterless and alone.

"She has been growing feeble for more than a year; but for three weeks she has coughed day and night, and her cheeks have been like the roses I used to gather on the old bush at home. Oh, sir, we used to live in the sweetest little cottage in the beautiful country, and there was a bright river and great green trees, where the birds sang from morning till night, and Esther was gayer than any one of them; that was before *he* came——" She stopped short and burst into tears.

A rumble of carriage-wheels at the door smote the air, and soon the soft rustle of garments in the passage told the physician someone was coming. He turned from the bedside and met the lovely face of Catherine Rolfe. She bowed distantly; he set his stern lips close together and went away

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by himself to the window. Miss Rolfe advanced to the bedside and looked on the still face of the dying girl. A sudden tremor shook her frame beneath the wealth of sables and velvets; she turned quickly to the little girl.

"Elsie, why did you not come for me? How long has she been like this?"

"Indeed, Miss Rolfe, I would have come, but Esther would not let me. She said she could not ask for charity—and you have done so much for us. Oh, madam, do you think Esther will die?"

Miss Rolfe went to the door, dismissed her carriage, threw off her cloak, and took Elsie into her arms, soothing her as best she might with her low, sweet consolations. In the solemn presence of death, there was no remembrance of the pomp and pride of worldly rank. The belle of Society had no scruples in holding to her bosom the child of lowly poverty.

So they sat there in silence through the dark hours, the pitiless rain beating against the window, the blue-eyed babe moaning over its mother, and Esther Armitage slowly drifting out on the shoreless sea. Towards midnight she rallied, opened her mild eyes and gazed round; they fell first on Miss Rolfe. A brilliant smile, making her radiantly beautiful, lit up her face.

"How kind of you!" she said faintly.

Miss Rolfe's fingers closed over hers.

"You are better now, Esther, are you not?"

"I am easier. Dear lady, in a little while I shall know no more pain for ever. My sins forgiven, I shall rest. God is good."

"Yes, and merciful. Esther, is it all well with you?"

"All well. I have no fear; beyond it is light."

Miss Rolfe was weeping softly. Dr. Woodbury drew near the bedside. Esther lay quiet a moment, then she spoke again:

"When I am dead you will find among my few papers, in the little portfolio yonder, a packet addressed to you. It is my simple history. Judge me as you always have, charitably—the dead have a claim to gentle judgment." She paused a moment for breath, then continued: "Everything is peaceful, except my anxiety for my sister and my babe. But I will not doubt. God will provide for them."

Dr. Woodbury came close to the bedside.

"If you will only give your sister to me?" he said timidly. "I am alone in the world; no one to love, no one to love me. She shall be all in all to me."

Esther gazed a moment up into the grave, tender face which leant over her, then she said:

"I do not know your name, but I can trust your eyes; there is truth in them. Take her, and be gentle with her always—dear little Elsie!"

Miss Rolfe was holding the baby; she spoke now, low and sweet:

"I have already told you that Frankie should find a home with me, Esther. Now, in the presence of witnesses, I repeat the promise, and may God deal with me as I deal with your child!"

The pale fingers of the dying mother clasped the rosy, dimpled ones of her babe; her voice sank to a whisper:

"Good-bye, my comforter."

She was dead, even as her lips ceased to move.

* * * * *

Two days afterwards there was a quiet funeral, and Esther Armitage was laid to rest. Dr. Woodbury and Elsie, Miss Rolfe, the baby, and the officiating clergyman, followed the coffin to the grave.

Elsie went home with the doctor; Miss Rolfe took the child away with her. A nurse was already provided, for Miss Rolfe, being an heiress, without parents to fetter her in any way, acted absolutely in the matter. She was engaged for the opera that evening with Mr. Mowbray. A splendid bouquet of white camellias lay there on the table before her—*his* gift, just brought in.

She looked at them, a latent gleam of tenderness in her eyes, half raised them to her lips, blushed and dropped them back again. Then, selecting a spray of the flowers, she twined it in her hair, her thoughts all the time wandering away to the memory of Esther Armitage. She remembered how she had looked the first time she saw her, white and thin, asking for work in a milliner's shop. Miss Rolfe's sympathies had been aroused by the air of subdued suffering hovering over her; she had sought her out and given her sewing at prices which seemed almost fabulous to the poor seamstress. She had pressed benefits upon her with an unsparing hand (for Miss Rolfe, though a woman of fashion, had a noble soul under all the worldly dross), but Esther's exquisite pride refused all charity; she would toil until death, but to beg—never!

Latterly, Miss Rolfe confessed it with shame and distress, she had lost sight of her *protégée*, and knew nothing of her dire extremity, until the night of Esther's death, when an old woman, who lived in the same wretched tenement with her, had informed the lady of her suffering. She had been so much occupied lately with Mr. Mowbray, that she had forgotten the seamstress, remembering her only too late to aid. But she could care for the child; she would care for him; the interest she would feel in its welfare might, in a measure, atone for her forgetfulness of the mother.

Thinking of Esther, Miss Rolfe bethought her of the sealed packet addressed to herself; she had taken it home the night of Esther's death. And with trembling fingers, while she waited for the coming of her lover, she broke the seal fixed by hands now quiet in the grave.

There were several closely-written sheets, and the beautiful woman, sitting there in that luxurious room, with the mellow splendour of amber silk curtains and velvet lounges round her, grew ashen white as she read the contents. The little gold and ormolu clock on the mantel tolled out the hour with its silvery voice—the hour when Mr. Mowbray might be expected to escort Miss Rolfe to the opera. She did not heed it; she was pacing the floor restlessly, torn with emotion, crushing fiercely the silent witness with her hand.

It was over at last; all the struggle was subdued. Lines of stern resolution settled round the scarlet mouth, and the steady light of an unalterable purpose gleamed in her eye. She took the flowers from her hair and threw them down with the drooping camellias.

A few moments later the servant announced Mr. Mowbray. She went down to him calm, cold, and self-possessed; their interview was brief and to the point. She asked his attention while she could read to him the crushed sheets before her; and she read them to him word for word—the pitiful, touching story of Esther Armitage. He listened, and no wonder that he grew pale beneath the fine scorn which displayed itself in every clear intonation of the reader; no wonder his brow flushed and his breath came thick and heavy, for the last confession of Esther Armitage told how Layton Mowbray had secretly married her, and how he had afterwards cruelly deserted her. But, poor soul, she had loved him so dearly that she would not denounce him!

He started up, an impulsive denial quivering to his lips. Miss Rolfe motioned him down.

"Be quiet, Mr. Mowbray! It is useless to add falsehood to the

list of your sins. Esther Armitage is at rest. For you —whom, Heaven forgive me! I almost loved, whom now I scorn—leave me, and never again dare to come into my presence! I have the pleasure of wishing you a very good evening."

* * * * *

Elsie Armitage was happy with Dr. Woodbury. He rented a small house in the suburbs, and here, with an old woman, to whom he had rendered a service, Elsie's calm life was passed. He taught her from the books he had, and learnt to love her as the one thing left to him in all the world. She went often to see her sister's child, at Miss Rolfe's request; but Dr. Woodbury and Catherine never met, unless by pure accident, and then only ceremonious words passed between them.

Two years elapsed. Woodbury rose rapidly in his profession. Men began to speak of him with respect for his wonderful skill; he was called to the first families, and his way to fortune seemed assured. Miss Rolfe was still unmarried, as greatly admired as ever; but they called her an iceberg, and said that the heart joined to hers would be frozen to stone. Layton Mowbray was in Paris, where rumour said he was making successful suit for the hand of a gay French belle.

Day by day Catherine became more deeply attached to little Frankie Armitage, and the beautiful boy knew no dearer tie than that which united him to his benefactress.

As the summer heat drew on, a malignant fever made its appearance in the city, sweeping off old and young before its tread; and earlier than usual, on the child's account, Catherine prepared to go to her country house. The first of July found her established there, and ten days afterwards Frankie was seized with the dread malady.

Miss Rolfe dispatched a messenger at once for Dr. Woodbury, who arrived by express, but only too late. The first glance showed him that the child must die, and without reserve he told Catherine the truth. At the end of the week little Frankie lay in the great room robed for the grave, and Catherine lay in her darkened chamber, a victim of the same fatal disease that had sapped the life fountains of the child.

From her sick bed Dr. Woodbury returned home, to find Elsie in the grasp of the destroyer, and though he worked and prayed incessantly, nothing availed; she died, her burning hands in his; her half unconscious lips blessing him to the last.

After that he exposed himself recklessly. No fever-stricken house so bad that he shrank to enter it; no toil too hard for him to refuse. Back and forth from Catherine Rolfe's home to the city he journeyed, giving himself time neither to eat nor sleep, until at last the dread crisis was past.

The struggle with Catherine Rolfe was long and painful.

It was over at length; his care and patience were rewarded. He knew that she would live. Feeble and weak as an infant she was, but every day gave her a little more strength, and by the cooler days of September she was able to sit up for an hour or two by the window. Now that she was better, Dr. Woodbury turned resolutely away from her house—the dangerous sweetness of its atmosphere might make him less strong for what was to come in the future. He would destroy, if possible, every tender memory that might come back to him of those days—every sacred breath, and tone, and thrill, must be utterly and for ever annihilated.

Once he had treasured as his greatest prize a knot of crimson velvet that had fallen from Miss Rolfe's hair at a crowded assembly; but he had burnt the souvenir long ago and watched it consume to ashes.

A new existence was opening before him. A German nobleman, whose life he had saved during the prevalence of the fever, desiring to testify his gratitude in a substantial manner, had offered him the post of surgeon in a German hospital, the appointment of which was in his hands; and as the position would be of advantage to a young practitioner, Woodbury resolved to accept it. He called on Miss Rolfe to inform her of his intention, and also to bid her "Good-bye." Gladly would he have gone without this distressing formality, but common courtesy required it of him.

It was a mild day in October; the sweet air luminous with golden particles of sunshine; the leaves of the trees drifting downward, like flocks of tropical birds.

Miss Rolfe sat by the window, toying with a cluster of flowers. She had never been more lovely than she was this moment; her brilliancy had given place to gentleness, and the magnificent hair, which had once adorned her head like a royal crown, was shorn away, leaving a mass of short, clustering curls, like a little child's.

She smiled brightly up into his face and gave him a seat on the divan at her side. There was a painful constraint between them; the conversation drifted into indifferent channels. He was ill-at-ease and nervous; she, puzzled and distant. He rose at last and touched her hand with his cold fingers.

"Miss Rolfe, I shall not be able to see you again before my departure. I must wish you 'Good-bye' now."

She grew pale, rising slowly to her feet.

"Your departure, Dr. Woodbury?"

"Yes. I go to Germany next week."

"Indeed!—to be absent long?"

"For my lifetime, probably."

She crushed the sharp groan that rose to her lips; all the old pride was not yet gone out of her, but her voice was harsh and unnatural.

"Allow me to wish you Godspeed, Dr. Woodbury."

She dropped his hand and turned away. He went out at the door; some irresistible impulse forced him to look back. Miss Rolfe's face was hidden in her hands, and her whole frame shook beneath the flood of emotion that swept over her.

In a moment she was in his arms; everything was forgotten. He only knew that he had loved her for years, that he loved her still, and that his regard was requited. Station, wealth, pride—what were they? He was a man, and she was the one woman of his love.

Dr. Woodbury did not go to Germany. The German nobleman regretted it, but the doctor was happy in refusing. It was better, he thought, to be the husband of Catherine Rolfe, than a great surgeon. So he chose what seemed to him the better.

C. Moore.

He: "I am fond of you." She: "How well we agree." He: "What, are you fond of me?" She: "Oh, no. Of myself."

Miss Trill: "I love to hear the birds sing." Jack Downright (warmly): "So do I. They never attempt a piece beyond their ability."

Mr. Williams (Fanny's admirer): "Is your sistah going to the seaside this summah, Tommy?" Tommy: "That all depends on you. I heard ma say that if you and Fanny were engaged before the season opened, there would be no need for her to go."

Mr. Dreamsleigh: "Yes, darling, clouds may lurk in the dim unknown future, but when with you, dearest, I think of nothing but the present—the happy, the beautiful present!" Loved One: "Yes, George, so do I; but take me with you to buy it—you men have such odd tastes in rings."

"So Marjorie Dobbins is going to be married," said the young man who had been calling on Nellie for two years, and had not declared himself. "Well, I suppose her parents will be sorry to lose her, for parents usually are, aren't they?" "Indeed, I can't say," replied Nellie, "but papa is in the next room, and you might ask him."

He was a speculator, and for a year past nothing had been coming his way except expenses. Misfortunes never flock by themselves. One day his daughter informed him in a cold and unfeeling manner that if he did not give her a diamond tiara worth at least £150 she would elope with the coachman. 'Come to my arms, my darling child," he exclaimed, as the tears of joy coursed down his wrinkled cheeks; "come to my arms." "Do I get the tiara?" she asked, hesitating ere she accepted his invitation. "Of course not," he smiled delightedly; "you get the coachman. I owe him eight months' wages."

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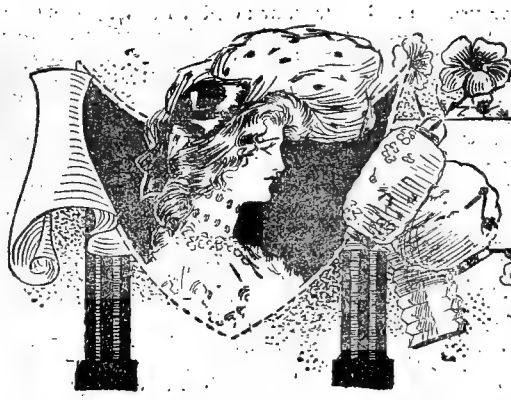

HER IDEAL LOVER.

Telling How He Came to Kitty Willowby Late in Life.

THE gate latch clicked cheerily as it fell from his hand, and the fresh breeze, crossing the rose garden at the left of the lawn, was sweet with the rich fragrance of roses.

The man's step grew more elastic as he left the road and walked up the path. The sweetness of the air in the cool shadow of the trees brought with it new life. He threw back his drooping shoulders, his eyes brightened, and he felt almost strong.

The hall door stood wide open. The vague, nameless charm deepened, and made him buoyant and glad. A small servant with a spotless apron answered his ring.

"Your mistress is expecting me," he began, opening his card-case, when a soft, cheerful voice interrupted him:

"Yes, you are Mr. Lawrence Allen. I received your uncle's telegram. Are you very tired?"

She was standing in the cool hall, a woman somewhat above the medium size, and past her youth. The face was strong, brave, and tender, with dark, steadfast eyes, and softly parted hair.

"Tired? I don't believe I am, Miss Willowby. At least, I don't feel so now." He held his hat in his hand and smiled at her from the doorway.

"And yet you walked—I heard no carriage, and I was expecting one."

She had offered her hand in cordial fashion, and he was thinking how cool and white and strong it was as she smiled up into his face.

"Yes, I was obliged to; there was nothing at the station and it isn't far. You must not consider me as actually an invalid."

"No, indeed," she smiled, "assuredly not. You are far too young for that."

He flushed. Somehow he felt sorry to be young.

"It's the way I look," he said quickly. "I am not so very young; I'm twenty-three."

"Are you?" she said, a little wistful smile showing about her sweet, firm lips, as she looked straight into his blue eyes. "Come in. I think you should rest awhile before you go up to your room. You will have the sitting-room to yourself for an hour or so."

They had come into it now, the cool, home-like place with its soft couches and cosy corners and wide open windows, a restful room with its dark colours and sweet odours and fresh breezes.

"I believe I was tired," he said, sinking down on a couch by the window. "But this is a delightful place, and I must have forgotten. I am glad I came, Miss Willowby; I shall be as happy as a schoolboy here."

She laughed softly. "Thank you," she said simply. "My people feel very much at home."

"Why, do you know I'd forgotten that it is a boarding house? You are not in the least like a landlady." He raised his head from the cushion and looked at her. It was hard to realise that he had not known her before

"Nevertheless, I am one, and there will be no sweets for your dinner, Mr. Allen, unless I go and make something at once. Please make yourself as comfortable as possible, and consider yourself quite at home."

When he was alone he began to look about him. A little table with some needlework on it stood near him. He stretched out his hand, and picked up the silver thimble from the folds of the sewing. It was larger than he had ever seen. How large and strong and white her hands were! Smiling, he fitted the thimble on his own fingers. It was too large for any of them.

"Dora's thimble is such a tiny affair. Her hands are such mites. I wonder what they are good for? Just to flutter about and look pretty, I suppose." He turned the thimble about and read the words, "Dear Kitty," engraved on the wide gold band.

"Kitty. That's a lover's name. People never give it unless a lot of love goes with it. A good many people must love her. I wonder who does specially? Who gave her the name and the thimble? Maybe her sweetheart." And then he laughed. Somehow the idea seemed incongruous. She was not the woman to connect with that sort of thing. "She is like mother, somehow," he mused. "A fellow feels at home when she's about." He set the thimble down and leant back on his cushion, smiling.

Through the window came the scent of the roses. Bees buzzed drowsily, tumbling lazily in and out. A butterfly floated slowly in and lost itself in the shadows across the room. Far away was the slow hum of the town. The yellow head sank more heavily upon the crimson cushion, the blue eyes closed, and Miss Willowby's new invalid boarder was asleep.

On the next day the specialist called upon his new patient in the airy bedroom upstairs. Half-an-hour passed, and the doctor came down and called for Miss Willowby.

"I'm sorry, Miss Kate, to upset any of your plans, but I'll have to have the boy brought down. The stairs won't agree with that spine of his; and we can't shut him up. Won't you let him have this room with the small bedroom beyond?"

They were standing in the sitting-room.

"Gladly, Dr. Spicer, and at once. Is—is he——"

"Of course you've heard how it happened? No? Well, there was a fire, and a child was forgotten, and he went up after it. The boy saved it, too, but he had to jump for his life, and—it's the old story."

But the great doctor said no more, and Miss Kate dared not ask.

Lawrence was delighted when the sitting-room became his own. "For it's the homeliest place I've ever dropped into; and I shall stand a chance of seeing you oftener, Miss Kitty." He looked at her with laughing, daring eyes, as he spoke the name. "I found it on your thimble," he explained penitently, as she looked at him in surprise.

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She was very grave. "People do not usually call me by that name," she said.

"I know, but you are that to the people who love you, Miss Kitty. I should think nearly everybody would be calling you so. Did your—sweetheart give it to you?"

His boyish face was so frank in its half-timid daring that the stern displeasure faded from Miss Willowby's dark eyes, and she laughed brightly.

"Oh, no," she said. "I've never had a sweetheart, and I am thirty."

"I knew you were not that kind; and it's so much better," he said with grave approval.

"I've found life very full of hard work and genuine enjoyment, and there was never time for those things."

She arranged the last of the roses she had brought in, and smiled brightly across them.

"You are not like any woman I have known. Do you know"—and his blue eyes darkened and his voice softened—"that you are the memory of my mother come to life? At first it puzzled me. You see mother died when I was a little fellow, and I do not remember her. But I've always wanted her and loved her. There was no portrait, but a picture of her grew in my mind, and you are like it. You are the living picture."

There were tears in the boy's blue eyes, and Miss Willowby bent over the roses.

Dr. Spicer's new patient became a favourite among Miss Willowby's boarders. Miss Willowby herself found much time to devote to him. Sometimes she read to him, and once in a while he was able to keep her when it was too late for reading.

"You are tired of poor Bobbie Burns and his love songs," he said, as she closed the book and looked out into the growing gloom.

"No; it is only because I cannot see the words. I like the pretty verses. Besides, it is time I was looking after things outside."

"Not yet. You like the verses, and yet you were never in love?"

She laughed in her quiet, bright way. "I did not tell you that, but only that I'd never had a lover;" and a wistful smile lingered about her lips.

"But you are not the sort of woman to—to——"

"I think not," she said decidedly, a proud ring in her voice. "And yet I am able to understand. I dare say my conception of love is very defective, very far short; however, my experience has been entirely satisfactory. But all this is extremely foolish. Have you taken that last medicine? Dr. Spicer said——"

"I know, about the trained nurse. I'm not bad enough for that. But won't you explain what you were saying? Whom have you loved, Miss Kitty?"

"I shall have to defend myself. It was only an ideal—a creature of the imagination."

"I should have said you were the last person to——"

"Dream dreams?" she interrupted. "But once I was a girl, and all girls are dreamers, only sometimes the dreams are spoilt. Mine never was. There was never any time for lovers and love-making, and I was not the sort of girl to attract admirers, in any case. But always there were my dreams, even when I worked hardest for the children. Mother was so frail, and there was so much to be done. She has been at rest only a year; but before that the children were settled in life, and I had only her to work for. It was easier than working for one's self. I loved her so! But that was over, too, at last; and now nobody needs me in any special way. All along there were my lovely dreams. I have never told anyone before. It was too late for—but I have not missed or needed anything, for have I not had my——"

She stopped, a tender light in her soft eyes.

"What?" he asked, leaning forward in the dim light.

"Only my ideal, my dream-lover. He was always young and fair to see, always bonny and good and true, always coming, coming to me." Her voice was almost a whisper now. Her face was transfigured.

Lawrence bent down and touched the fair, strong hand on the window-ledge with his lips.

"Hasn't he come at last? I love you," he said softly.

Instantly she was the calm, practical woman again.

"Of course you do," she said, in a matter-of-fact way. "You are an invalid, and I've tried to be good to you. I'll light your lamps. Mrs. Ellis is leaving by the nine o'clock express. Shall I send her to bid you good-bye?"

In the flood of light she stood cool and collected, waiting for his reply.

"If you please," he stammered, his face crimson, his eyes lowered.

Almost immediately Mrs. Ellis came.

"I wish I could carry a better report to Dora and Uncle Ben," she said, looking gravely at the flushed, boyish face.

"I wish you could, thank you. At least tell them that I am as happy as a lark," he said, laughing confusedly.

"I will. Dora will be coming to see you when the season is a little nearer over, with Uncle Ben."

"Do you really think so? If only she—wouldn't!"

Mrs. Ellis laughed merrily. "Why, you bad boy, you ought to be glad to see your pretty sweetheart. People say it's as good as settled between you three. Ah, there's the carriage, and here's Miss Kate to hurry me off. Hope you'll soon be all right. Good-bye!"

The summer deepened and softened, and autumn was near. Dr. Spicer wished to have his patient out of doors while the sunshine lasted. Nobody could drive like Miss Willowby, whose hands were strong and skilful, and who knew every inch of road for miles and miles.

"I'm sorry they are coming," he said as they drove slowly along. "Dora always manages to spoil things so."

"I dare say she will have plenty of interesting news, coming straight from your own world," Miss Willowby said brightly.

"No, she won't. I say, Miss Kitty, have you forgotten what I told you on the night you read to me? I'm not such a boy as you think. I've had lots of experience, and no end of love affairs. Don't smile that way, please; I am terribly in earnest. Won't you let me be your ideal? Don't I look a little like him? I do love you, honestly; won't you love me? Somehow I believe you do already." And, bending forward, he looked laughingly into her grave eyes. "Let's get married, and then I shall be happy, if I am—not strong. And you love me, don't you? This probably isn't what that ideal has been saying, but it's the best I can do."

She turned her cool, pale face to him, and looked calmly into his eager eyes.

"I have let you say it all now. You won't do it again, will you?" she said slowly.

"I am afraid I shall, dear Kitty," he said miserably. "You are what I've been needing all along. The girls were always unsatisfactory. Why can't I say these things to you?"

"Because I can't help to take care of you, if you persist," she answered quietly.

"Not take care of me? Then I won't be taken care of at all. That's no reason."

"It is wrong. You are simply pleased with my home, and I have been able to make you comfortable. It is a sort of gratitude, and not love."

"You know better. It isn't like you to be so unfair."

But she had stopped at the gate.

Miss Willowby had always carried the invalid his tea, but to-night she was late with it.

"Put it down, please. I'm going to finish what I was saying." She placed the tray on the table, and stood before him.

"Dear Kitty, you know I'm right. Can't you see that I belong to you? I began to feel it when I heard your gate latch click behind me, when I came into the fragrance of your roses, when I looked into your eyes. Oh, the sweetness of it all! You can't help caring for me."

"No," she said quietly, "I cannot."

"Then let me have my way, dear Kitty."

"Have you thought of what you are saying? Don't you

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see how impossible it is? I am not a young woman. Soon I shall be faded and old. You are a boy, with life all before you." Her voice was not quite steady here, but she went on: "Your friends would ridicule the idea."

"As if I were to blame for being a boy! And besides, haven't you been loving a boy all along in that ideal of yours? And haven't I told you that you have always been in my heart? Don't put me off. It's bad enough to have the doctors looking graver every day——"

"Hush. You may be well again."

"They haven't said so."

"But your uncle and Dora! No, it is not to be thought of."

"I have no one to please; answer me!"

"Lawrence, I will answer you five years from to-night. Your uncle will want you to try other doctors, so you will go away. Come to see me when the five years are past, and I will answer you. I shall be five-and-thirty then. In the meantime, do whatever you want to; of course you will not feel bound in any way. Now, that is all. Please do not speak of it again;" and she left him.

Shortly after this Dora came—Dora, with her curly, flaxen hair, brown eyes, and dimpled face. She was pretty as a flower.

Behind the pretty vision came Uncle Ben, an old man with fierce, grizzled side whiskers, and small, fiery eyes.

"Oh, Larry, how ill you look! Oh, have you actually been shut up in this doleful place all the summer? I've had a delightful time. Are you getting worse, Larry?"

"I'm sure I don't know, Dora. Nobody has told me. It may be the way folks get well. Anyhow, I'm quite happy."

"Oh, dear me, don't talk so. Uncle Ben, don't let him! I'm afraid you must be going to die, you know."

Uncle Ben scowled fiercely, and Miss Willowby, laughing in her cheery way, took Dora out.

"Now you know what I meant," Lawrence said to Miss Willowby next morning. "Girls are—unsatisfactory."

"But this is a wonderfully pretty one," she said.

"Pretty—yes, she's that, and nothing more. Do you know, the doctors were graver than ever this morning? Not even Spicer could get up a smile. Of course, you saw them?" He smiled as he stood unsteadily before the small, bright fire that crackled on the hearth. "Dear Kitty, I am surely not doing well. Only think, I—hush, that was my name. He is in the hall. Be still—I will hear!"

With his bright eyes holding her, he listened. The hall door was ajar. Yes, Uncle Ben was speaking in a high, impatient voice.

"Bravery, indeed! And he will find out about the bank failure. The boy is ruined. I tell you, Dora, you must help him. He gladly lost half his fortune securing yours for you. Not engaged? Who cares? It has always been my plan to marry you two, and you said you loved him. Get him to propose now, and marry the boy at once."

Then Dora's voice came to them.

"Oh, well, of course, I loved Larry, but I'm glad he never proposed. He never shall, either. I don't want a poor man for my husband; and what should I want with him, any way, if he is to be helpless and blind?"

Before the cheery fire the unsteady form swayed. Miss Willowby's strong arm lowered it gently to the couch. Lawrence closed his eyes; his face was white.

"Helpless and blind!" he whispered.

"Nothing is certain. They think so. There is always hope."

"How long will it take?"

"It will be gradual; you can bear it."

"Will it take—five years? Because then I shall have you to help me bear it."

Her hot tears splashed on his hand.

"You have me now—always," she said.

His face was illumined. "I can bear it. I need not wait the five years?" he exclaimed, his eyes on her face.

A smile shone in her steadfast eyes.

"Not five hours, unless you will." **Ellen Wycoff.**

Your Editor Chats.

More about "Empire Day."

TUESDAY, May 24th, is the eighty-fifth anniversary of the birth of our late Queen and Empress, the beloved Victoria.

In order to commemorate our late Queen's birthday, the organisers of the Fresh Air Fund wish to give to many poor children a monster day's outing in the country later on in the summer. This day will be known as "Empire Day." Won't you subscribe just a small sum for the "Empire Day" Fund? The smallest donation will be thankfully received. Will those who intend that their gifts should be devoted especially to "Empire Day" please note that their offerings should be sent in envelopes addressed to the Hon. Secretary, Fresh Air Fund, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C., and should have "Empire Day" marked in the top left-hand corner.

A Guinea Won.

I HAVE much pleasure in announcing that I have awarded the guinea I offered in connection with the Love-Problem, "The Test of Ruth Lawson," to A. R. Hayward, 190 Northumberland Avenue, Tottenham, N.

Result of the "Signature" Competition.

No one sent in a correct set of solutions to this competition. One competitor succeeded in sending more correct solutions than the others, three were next bracketed together; two following share the third prize, and sixteen the eight succeeding prizes, as below:

EDWARD BARNES, 68 LYDFORD ROAD, PADDINGTON, W. Prize, £10.

Miss Annie Corbishley, The Elms, Shaw Heath, Stockport.
W. Gibbs, 37 Old Fillebrook Road, Leytonstone, N.E.
C. T. Marshall, 32 Granton Road, Liverpool.
} £1 13s. 4d. each.

W. C. Lee, 160 Shaw Heath, Stockport.
R. Waddington, 17 Langham Road, Blackburn.
} Prize of £2 divided equally.

The following receive 10s. each: J. N. Coombs, 41 Southwater Road, St. Leonards; J. Anderson, 9 Osborne Street, Sherwood, Notts; Miss S. Ogden, St. Peter's Avenue, Knutsford; Miss Ada Lee, 160 Shaw Heath, Stockport; Jas. Lee, 160 Shaw Heath, Stockport; Jas. Angus, Redclyffe, Cardross, N.B.; J. W. Dimaline, 64 Apley Road, Doncaster; F. M. Burd, 23 Hibbert Street, Rusholme, Manchester; Edward Burt, 5 Sidney Terrace, Bellevue Road, Totterdown, Bristol; H. Bell, South Lawn, Bishop's Stortford; L. Halstead, 33 Tennyson Street, Lee Mount, Halifax; H. G. Harris, 22 Foulser Road, Balham, S.W.; W. E. Hughes, 244 Kennington Road, S.E.; S. M. Owens, Peterboro' Avenue, Wycombe; C. J. Ingrey, 25 Ranelagh Grove, Westminster, S.W.; F. W. Rabnott, 117 Sixth Avenue, Manor Park.

The following is the list of correct solutions: 1, J. N. Montgomery; 2, Robert Allinson; 3, W. McGregor; 4, F. P. Knowles; 5, Frank Thos. Way; 6, T. Harker; 7, J. R. Fairhurst; 8, Edward Diven; 9, Geo. A. Nunns; 10, Alf. Redman; 11, W. B. Whitelaw; 12, D. Cooper; 13, Chas. Wiscombe; 14, A. P. Speakman; 15, R. H. Pattinson; 16, F. McGurgan; 17, H. Varenne-Cullevne; 18, G. Margaritis; 19, A. E. Rea; 20, P. Campbell Forbes; 21, J. T. Greenroyd; 22, D. Joseph Schneider; 23, F. Wiles; 24, A. J. Frazer; 25, Thomas R. Brown; 26, Henry Ogden Howcroft; 27, W. G. Andrew; 28, Gwynllyan Wykeham Williams; 29, R. N. Kennedy; 30, Arthur Taylor; 31, C. O. Colchester; 32, Winnie Mouton; 33, Stanley Read; 34, William Newman Yeo; 35, Edward Elford **Your Editor.**

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Our Dinner at Bawlins' . . Lodge. . .

The Tale of a Dinner That Was a Failure, and of a Fortune That Was Won.

All that I remembered of my bachelor uncle, James Bawlins, was, when I was a small boy, seeing him walk out of the house with a black look when my father asked him for a loan of some money. I was then five years old; I am now twenty-five, and newly married. My father had been dead a year, and I had supported him in the latter days, letting the old gentleman potter about the house while I worked at my desk in the bank.

I could not have recognised Uncle James had I seen him after these twenty years. I knew that as many as twenty relatives, men, women, and children, had been visiting him, and, no doubt, smiling upon him, and talking about Brother James, and Cousin James, and Uncle James. For the old gentleman was very rich.

Bawlins' Lodge, his country residence, was situated in the midst of broad lands, and was secluded to a degree that was melancholy.

When the following letter came I was rendered by it a little gleeful and a little bewildered. Fanny, my wife, said it was horribly sarcastic. I stuck to it that Uncle James wished to be reconciled, and intended to remember me in his will. I told Fanny not to make this remark of mine public, lest it should get to his ear, and ruin my expectations.

The letter was as follows:

"*Bawlins' Lodge, April 8th.*

"My Dear Nephew,—*You have never visited your dear, old, rich, mortal uncle. Hadn't you better come up, as well as the rest of his beloved relatives, to see how he is spending the small remnant of his term of existence on earth? Wouldn't you like to see how happy he can be on being perpetually reminded that he is not heirless? Most affectionately yours,*

"James Bawlins."

I sent word to my uncle that I should be most happy to visit him, with my wife, on the Saturday of the following week. I got a few days' leave from the bank, almost at the risk of losing my situation. Fanny trembled when I told her, I laughed.

On the Saturday in question we two were landed from the train at a little station, in the midst of a little village, a hundred miles from London. It was a clear, but very cold, afternoon.

Awaiting us at the station was a lovely carriage and pair, with an old coachman wrapped up in furs.

We were not sorry when the door of that great house—that stone palace—was reached, and we were received into the warmth and glow of the beautiful hall, and thence up to the beautiful drawing-room. For we were chilled; I might say, also, that we were hungry, and that, for my part, I was depicting in my mind a sumptuous feast, to which presently we should be invited. I was not disappointed. We were promptly invited to sit down at a table sumptuously provided.

We had been received at the door and attended to by a man so large and fat, and so red in the face, as to cause me at once to classify him among the few extraordinary personages whom it had been my good fortune in the course of my life to meet.

He lifted upon us the light of his ruddy countenance as though he were the very host himself. A sound like a guttural laugh came now and then from the depths of his fat chest. After he shook my hand, I was afraid to have him shake Fanny's, lest he should hurt her, for he gave mine a vice-like grip. She did scream a little.

The hospitality of his welcome, however, did us both good.

My uncle, or at least any person whom I might have taken for him, did not appear, and we asked no questions, supposing that he would shortly make himself visible.

What we wanted just then was what we were invited to partake of as soon as we should become sufficiently warmed—dinner.

As I have said before, the dinner was sumptuous. The servant, on removing the covers from the dishes, was ordered away, and our fat entertainer rose from his seat at the table, locked the door of the room, and pocketed the key.

"I am your dear, old, rich, mortal uncle," said he, reseating himself at the head of the table, and glancing smilingly from us upon the viands that were huddled together before him—roast beef and roast turkey, vegetables, pastry, coffee, wine, and so on; "and I am most happy to see under my roof, and at my table, too, more of my numerous heirs. Indeed," he continued, while he carved from the meat a rich slice, and put it on a plate, "I am glad to know that I have heirs to whom my fortune may become a blessing."

He put vegetables on the plate, placed the plate before him, poured gravy over all, and then a goodly portion of sauce. I was on the point of reaching out my hand to receive the dish, and pass it to Fanny, when he proceeded to eat from it himself.

"A tender piece of meat," he said, talking on, and at the same time eating like an ogre. "Roast beef ought to be well done. This is just right. It is juicy and nourishing."

"Fanny, I believe, would like a piece of it," I ventured to suggest, wondering at the eccentricity of his behaviour and urged by hunger.

"Beef is the staff of life," he continued, without appearing to notice my hint. "After a little jaunt I don't know its equal. It goes to the right spot, and sets one up again, and puts one in a cheerful mood for the drawing-room of an evening."

"What you say is very true," I said, "and Fanny would like——"

"Here's the wine, now," he said, still not appearing to notice my hint.

He had been gourmandising at the meat until its dimensions were very much reduced. He now reached out his fat hand to a bottle of wine that, with several others, stood on the floor near him. He drew the cork and poured out a glassful, and, nodding his head to us, drank the wine off at a gulp.

"Ha!" he exclaimed, "old port! That's the stuff."

Desperate, and a little exasperated, I reached out my hands to carve off a slice from the turkey, that being nearest me. Still talking on, he warded off my hands, and I sank back into my chair again, angry and amazed.

"What does this mean?" I demanded. "Have you invited us here to tantalise us? Come, Fanny"—and I offered my arm to Fanny—"we will go."

He drank off six full glasses, one after the other, within the brief space of time in which Fanny was rising from the table and accompanying me to the door.

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I had forgotten that he had locked the door. I tried to open it, and then we two turned to him. I demanded the key. With his eyes turned to us, he poured out and drank off glass after glass, till he had emptied the first bottle and was drawing upon the second. And still he drank, with his fat, red face turned to us as we stood there.

Returning desperate manners for ill manners, I stalked up to him, and vented my feelings in an outburst of indignation. He rose to his feet, and steadied himself by holding on to the table. His great red face fairly burnt at me.

"I want the key!" I cried; and I seized him, to give emphasis to my demand.

He shook me off, and drank again, and staggered towards Fanny. I sprang between, and he returned to the table, and drank two or three glasses more. Again I tried to slice off a piece of turkey, thinking that Fanny would need something to sustain her till we might reach some resting place away from this inhospitable and outrageous place, if, indeed, we should succeed in escaping thence; for, indeed, the suspicion was creeping into my mind that this uncle of mine was mad, and might end in harming us in some way. He prevented me with a physical strength against which it was vain for me to cope.

"Let us out!" I cried.

"Won't you ever come again?" were the first definite words of recognition of us that this monstrous uncle had yet greeted us with.

The words sounded so rational that I roared back:

"Never, you inhospitable old boor! Give us the key, and let us out!"

He felt in his pocket, and staggered towards the door; but just then there rose from the other side a loud outcry, and then an impatient kicking.

I verily believe that the vast rotundity of my uncle's face, with the exception of his nose, turned pale. He stood still on the floor, and stared at the door.

"Open this door!" was roared from the other side, and then came another volley of kicks.

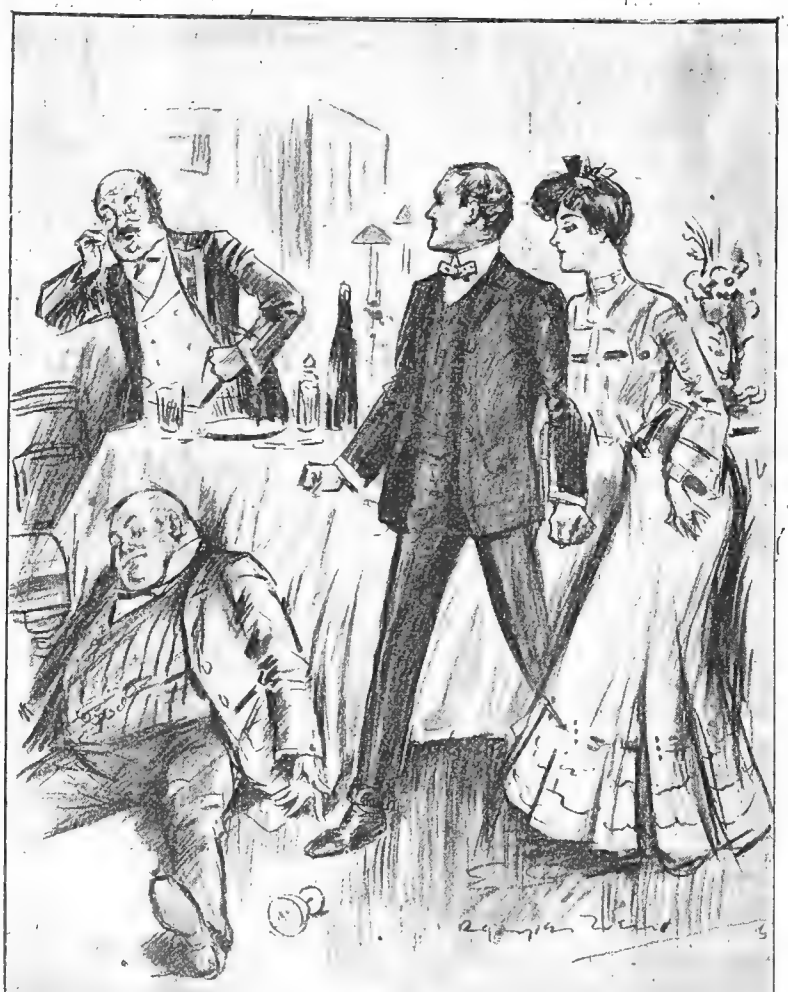
Finally there was given from the other side a violent push that burst open the door, and there came tumbling in, almost off his feet, a thin, dark old gentleman, followed by two o three servants.

"What's the matter?" demanded the old gentleman. "Who are you?" and, with his eyes glaring, he turned full upon the fat man.

The fat man made no reply.

"He came here ten days ago," explained a servant; "two hours after you left for your journey."

"Who is he, and what is he, and what the dickens is he getting drunk in my house for? Put him out!"



The fat man sat plump down on the floor. He weighed something like fourteen stone, probably more.

"I am your nearest relative," the fat man said.

"My nearest fiddlesticks! Put the lout out! Put him out! Out with him!"

The fat man sat plump down on the floor. He weighed something like fourteen stone, I should think; or more.

"Roll him out!" shouted the old gentleman. "Now, then," turning to us, "who are you?"

"I am James Bawlins," I said; "this is my wife."

The old gentleman eyed us. Suddenly he turned away, and railed at his servants, who were tugging at the fat man.

"We are going," I said. "You needn't fear we are not. We thought you invited us here; but there is evidently some mistake. This gourmandiser has played the host, and has prevented us from eating anything, so that we haven't touched a morsel. Did you write that letter?"

I handed him the letter of invitation. He read it.

"No, sir," said he, "I did not write that letter. But stay—I like your spirit; it is the Bawlins spirit; I am proud of it. I like your wife's looks—this is your wife? Stay, stay! I am your uncle! You have never come to see me, rich as I am. You're proud, eh? Well, well, I like that sort of pride. But when you thought I wrote this letter to you, you were willing to forgive my treatment of your father, and to come. I treated him badly, mind—badly. I might have helped him, and I ought to have helped him. My heart was hard."

The upshot of the matter was, that my uncle took Fanny and me into his favour, and our prospects are rosy.

F. Murray.

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TOO DEVOTED.

Showing That it is Best to be Contented.

"Yes," said Mrs. Cameron, in answer to her friend's remark, "I like him well enough, I suppose."

Mrs. Cameron was just nineteen, a bride of six months, and a lovely, hazel-eyed brunette. She had everything that heart could desire, and consequently wasn't exactly pleased with anything.

Mrs. Cameron liked pink, and Mr. Cameron had furnished her boudoir in rose-colour and silver. She was partial to flowers, and her husband had given a standing order to a florist to keep her wants supplied. She was fond of birds, and three or four gilded cages swung from the ceiling, each one thrilling with delicious melody. In fact, Mrs. Cameron had everything she wanted, and, as previously intimated, was far from satisfied.

"Like him well enough!" repeated Annie Clark, who, having just left school, thought that a young wife who had wedded the man she loved, ought to be extremely happy. "Oh, Rosie! how coldly you speak!"

"Well, I can't help it," said Mrs. Cameron, letting her head fall languidly back on the rose-satin cushions of the low easy-chair on which she sat. "One gets tired of cake and champagne all the time. Sometimes I think I should be happier if Clarence didn't worship me quite so devotedly."

"Oh, Rosie!"

"It's a bore, you know," said the young wife, confidentially. "It would be a relief if he could find fault occasionally. He's too good! Now, Sophie Markham is actually afraid of her husband—a great handsome fellow, with a lovely black silk moustache like an Italian brigand. Oh, it must be charming to be a little afraid of one's husband!"

"Now, Rosie!" cried the astounded Miss Clark, "what nonsense you are talking!"

"I dare say it may seem so to you, child," said Mrs. Cameron, patronisingly. "But if you ever get married——"

"Of course I shall," said pretty Annie, who had not the slightest idea of being an old maid.

"Well, when you are about to get married, don't marry a man who is 'sugar and spice and all that's nice!' It's much too insipid!"

"You'd recommend, on the contrary, 'snaps and snails and puppy dogs' tails,' eh?" laughed Annie, also quoting a nursery rhyme

"Not exactly that; but one does get tired of perpetual honey and sunshine," said unreasonable Rosie, as she reached out her hand for her embroidery. "And now you know you promised to tell me all about Kitty Smith's trousseau."

As it happened, Mrs. Cameron's beautiful drawing-room was separated from her boudoir by portieres. Mr. Cameron, reading his paper, sat on the other side of the draperies, and heard this conversation—an eavesdropper in spite of himself. His cheeks burnt, he bit his lips, and the blood rushed in little tingling, needle-like particles through his whole frame.

So Rosie was getting tired of him! Well, after all, it was better to thoroughly comprehend the whole state of the case. He was too amiable, was he?

Mr. Cameron rose, flung aside the crumpled newspaper, and walked once or twice the length of the rooms.

"I'll see that the fault is corrected," he said to himself with a grim smile. And he went off to business without the usual good-bye kiss in which he generally indulged.

Mrs. Cameron went out shopping in the afternoon, and was detained a little, but it did not worry her in the least.

"Clarence doesn't mind," said she; and so she spent an extra half hour in deciding whether she would have tan or pearl grey for her new kid gloves, and whether she looked better in a hat trimmed with sweet-brier or simple field daisies.

"I'm a little late, I'm afraid," she said, as she entered the dining-room, where her husband was pacing up and down like the proverbial "caged lion" of romance.

"Late, madam! I should say you were!" retorted her husband in a tone which fairly made Mrs. Cameron start. "It's half-past seven, if it's a second. But I suppose you think my time is of no value."

"Clarence!"

"I've borne this long enough," went on the indignant husband. "And I give you fair notice that I shall bear it no longer. Jane!"—to the girl—"bring in the dinner at once, and to-morrow let it be served at seven, punctually, whether your mistress is here or not."

"Yes, sir," said Jane, as she disappeared, grinning, into the kitchen.

Mrs. Cameron sat down, crimson to the very roots of her hair.

"Clarence," she said, with difficulty controlling her voice, "is it necessary to insult me thus before the servants?"

"Yes, madam, it is. If a wife doesn't comprehend her duty, it is high time she should be made to do so. I will trouble you for a cup of coffee."

Mrs. Cameron was mortified, stunned—dazed. She was entirely unused to this style of domestic reproof. Almost before the dessert—with which her husband found plenty of fault, intimating that it would be better if his wife remained at home to attend to household matters a little more, instead of gadding abroad the whole time—the door bell sounded.

"It's dear mamma and Aunt Lizzie come to spend the evening," said Rosie, jumping up.

"Confound them!" roared Mr. Cameron, smiting the table with his fist; "can't I have a quiet evening once in a while?"

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"I—I told them you would take us all to the theatre to-night," hesitated Rosie, the colour coming and going changefully on her face.

"In-deed! May I ask, madam, who authorised you to make that statement?" crisply queried her husband. "Am I a mere puppet in your hands, and am I supposed to have no will or desire of my own?"

"But you will go, won't you, Clarence?" faltered poor Rosie.

"No, madam, I will not," said Mr. Cameron, rising and looking for his hat. "I propose to spend the evening quietly at my club."

He bolted out of the room, nearly falling over his mother-in-law in the passage, and muttering to himself:

"By Jove! if I'd stopped another minute those tears would have conquered me. Poor little Rosie!"

It was past twelve before he returned. Never, in all the experience of their married life, had he been so late before.

"Sitting up, eh?" said he, savagely. "Now, Mrs. Cameron, I mean to put an end, once for all, to this sort of thing."

"I was so anxious about you, Clarence," pleaded poor Rosie.

"Anxious!" sneeringly repeated he. "Do you suppose John Markham allows his wife to sit up for him?"

"Oh, Clarence! I wouldn't have you like John Markham for the world!" exclaimed Rosie, bursting into tears.

"Wouldn't you?" said he, the faintest suspicion of a smile glimmering under the ends of his moustache. "Now, I thought it would be charming to be a little afraid of one's husband, and you know 'sugar and spice and all that's nice' grows insipid.

Mrs. Cameron sprang to her feet.

"Clary!"

"Rosie!"

"Did you hear what I said this morning?"

"I did, Mrs. Cameron, and I thought I would shape my conduct to suit your taste."

"Don't do it any more, Clary," she said, with a quivering lip, and her bright eyes lifted wistfully to his face. "I don't like it; it isn't nice to be afraid of one's husband."

"Just as you please," said her husband, laughing. "I only wanted to adapt myself to your wishes, Rosie."

"But I was such a goose!" cried Rosie. "Dear Clary, I have cried my eyes out to-night trying to make out what could possibly have changed you so. And you were only making believe all the time?"

"Only making believe," he acknowledged.

Then they kissed and made friends after the orthodox fashion, and their honeymoon began over again for the second time. But Rosie made no more complaints about Mr. Cameron being a "too devoted husband."

F. P. Barfoot.

DISILLUSIONED!

Showing How Dr. Stephens Counted His Chickens Before they were Hatched.

People said Dr. Stephens ought to marry. He thought so himself; but hitherto he had been too busy providing means for keeping a wife, to bestow much thought on whom she was to be. He had decided that the lady must have good looks, good means, and be of a good position; but, though several ladies in Perivale fulfilled all these requirements, his choice had not yet fallen on any one of them. And, besides, he was not in the least in love.

It would be imprudent to venture the assertion that Dr. Stephens had always remained indifferent to the pretty and agreeable girls he had met in his wanderings; and being a fairly attractive fellow, as well as Perivale's only medical practitioner, it is safe to say that eyes of every hue had looked upon him with more or less favour.

Oh! yes. He had had his intermittent love affairs. There was Maggie Scott. He had loved her to distraction for two months, when she wore a particularly sweet thing in hats; when the hat went out of fashion, Dr. Stephens' love went with it.

Again, there was Minnie Grey. His heart in this "case" had capitulated to the peculiarly fascinating manner in which the fair damsel lisped. He overheard her speak to her brother once, and——

But these and others were but the idle dreamlets of a day, and Dr. Stephens sighed for the genuine article that wears well. He excused his seeming inconstancy on the plea that love is a lottery, and, if one wishes to win, one must at least play. So he accordingly played battledore with the hearts of the fair eligibles on his list of patients, and kept his eyes open and watched his heart carefully, expecting to experience some day that sudden sense of rapture—that magnificent thrill which, as everybody knows, is the first and true symptom of the proper, and the legitimate, and the all-sufficing love—the love Dr. Stephens sighed for.

"It's all a matter of pulsation," the doctor assured himself. "If you think you're in love, feel your pulse. Cupid's barometer is the thing to go by."

One afternoon, about four o'clock, Dr. Stephens seated himself in his consulting-room, and passed his fingers thoughtfully through his hair, which could not, even in courtesy, be called auburn. He was very weary waiting for that magnificent thrill which he expected to experience some day, and he sighed profoundly as he glanced round the rather dismal room. How uncomfortable and cheerless it was, to be sure; how much it lacked the tender touches of a woman's hand, the charm of a woman's presence. And the little, low arm-chair by the hearth there—when would it be filled by the sweet little form—the unknown but coming somebody—that Dr. Stephens loved to picture in it? How very nice it sounded, to be sure! My—little—wife—wife. My—wee—wife. My——

"A letter, sir."

It was the doctor's servant who broke in upon his reverie.

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He frowned as he lifted the letter carelessly from the table, and opened it slowly. It was very brief, containing only these words:

"*Dovecot House, Tuesday.*

"Dear Sir,—*Please come and see me at once.—Yours truly,*

"Babs Grantley."

"Babs," he repeated. "What a funny name. Something nice about it, too. Some antediluvian spinster, I suppose, whose name is the only nice thing about her. Imperious, too, by George! I heard there were new tenants at Dovecot."

That is what John Stephens, M.D., as he signed himself, said before he saw Miss Barbara Grantley; and when his well-appointed brougham rolled along Perivale's only street, and drew up in the pretty garden in front of Dovecot House, our doctor, all unconscious of his impending fate, complacently jingled a couple of guineas in his trousers pocket, with the agreeable expectation of soon adding a third.

"Doctor Stephens," announced a smiling little maid, in a low voice; and as the doctor advanced with the door closing behind him, it was to see that he was in a prettily-furnished boudoir; while reclining on a couch near the fireplace was a lady, who immediately acknowledged his presence by a charming smile and bow. And then?—at last! Dr. Stephens experienced that magnificent thrill he had been waiting for so long. His heart thumped away, just as it ought to; his legs trembled; he felt a cold shiver up and down his spine; his mouth opened and closed several times in an aimless sort of a way; his pulse—but, in brief, he rapidly experienced every symptom which attends and indicates the existence of the proper, the legitimate, the genuine love. His happiness made him almost dizzy, and he had to seize hold of one of the chairs for support. Yes, this was love; there could not possibly be any mistake about it this time.

Vainly he endeavoured to assume his usual matter-of-fact, professional politeness. His heart beat so fast he could hardly speak.

"My patient, Miss Grantley, I presume. Would you—ah, ha——" he began, advancing towards the couch, with the assistance of the chair backs. (How funny his legs felt, to be sure!)

"Would you—ah, ah——," he repeated, taking Miss Grantley's proffered hand—which little courtesy had the wonderful effect of sending a second edition of that magnificent thrill through Stephens' sensitive system.

"Would you—ah, ha——" he solemnly repeated, determined to have it out this time, "would you allow me to see your pulse, and let me feel your tongue."

Now, Dr. Stephens had not the slightest intention of being amusing, but, to his infinite disgust, he discovered as soon as he spoke that Miss Grantley was greatly amused. She pressed her handkerchief to her face and bit her lips; but after a moment's futile struggle, she laughed outright, and evidently only checked herself when he looked so furious. In consideration for his injured feelings, she assumed an air of mild but preternatural seriousness.

"It—it—isn't my pulse or my tongue," she gravely explained, "it's my ankle, sir, and only a slight sprain."

Dr. Stephens was excessively embarrassed. He was not altogether stupid; and really, when we consider the suddenness of the thing it amply excuses the exhibition of a little foolishness and nervousness. And then to be asked to look at and touch her ankle!—and a very pretty ankle it was, too!

Apologising profusely, the doctor carefully—very carefully—examined the pretty little foot that just peeped out from among the many folds of Bab's skirts; and he vowed—to himself—that he would gladly go on bathing and bandaging his fair subject for ever.

Babs certainly looked nice. She was a small and dainty young lady with bonny, roguish blue eyes, and a wealth of wilful golden hair that frizzled over her brow, and looked as if it had been ruffled by many a sunny summer breeze. Dr. Stephens noticed with keen, observant eye the curling sweep of the long, brown lashes that shaded the delicately-rounded cheek, and, for the first time in his professional career, physical weakness struck him as the most pathetic and attractive aspect under which he had ever studied woman. He took a long time bandaging that little foot, and by the time it was finished he had quite recovered himself. His touch seemed to do her foot good; and Babs, watching the careful manipulation of bandaging, and listening to the pleasant, cheerful voice assuring her that she would be well again in a few weeks, felt that, strange though Dr. Stephens had been on his arrival, she could have no kinder or more skilful physician. Indeed, by the time Dr. Stephens took his departure, she had voted him "quite nice."

* * * * *

Dr. Stephens gave himself a month to accomplish the conquest of Miss Grantley's foot and heart; but before the third week was at an end he had realised that he had undervalued his powers of surgery and fascination. The sprain had certainly surrendered to his skill, and, building his faith on a dozen or so of smiles and glances, he allowed himself to entertain the agreeable belief that her heart had also surrendered to himself? He had often been told that he might choose a wife when and where he liked, and, with consummate conceit, he had lately thought the same thing himself.

Babs always seemed glad to see him, and she was wholly at ease with him. Indeed, she was always so gay and good-humoured that Dr. Stephens glowed and flourished in his own opinion—that opinion being that she was certainly very much in love with him. He would propose to her!

And then he fell into a delightful reverie, and pictured to himself the scene. He would kneel by that little couch by the fireplace and would ask her in tender phrases if she would be his wife. And then he wondered would his darling faint, or would she sink gracefully into his arms and whisper "Dear youth, I will!"

Dressing one evening with the punctilious care born of a long bachelor life, and with many hesitating doubts and fears, Dr. Stephens set out on an all-important visit to Dovecot House—a visit fraught with matrimonial intentions.

With as martial a step as he could command, Dr. Stephens went to Dovecot House, and instantly rang the bell very, very tenderly. He must not, he thought, alarm his little darling.

"I shall find my way, you need not trouble to come with me," he said to the smiling maid whose duty it was to attend to the door and announce arrivals. "Miss Grantley, I presume, is in the same room as usual?"

"Yes, sir; but please, sir, she's engaged just now."

But the doctor did not hear. Slowly, very slowly he went up the soft-carpeted staircase, and paused for a brief moment at the door before entering. His heart had resumed its stentorian thumping; his legs trembled—all, of course, in joyful anticipation of his coming happiness. He softly, very softly, turned the handle and opened the door. But, oh, what did the sight which met his gaze mean?

Standing in the embrasure of the window, with his arm round Babs' waist, was a tall and fair stranger! In his other hand he held a small golden ring, which he was showing to her.

"Isn't it strange, darling?" Dr. Stephens heard this tall, and fair, and unknown somebody say to—Babs, *his* Babs!—"isn't it strange, darling, that within the little circle of this ring there should be so much happiness and love, and hope for you and me? You must always wear it, dear, and, wearing it, remember that our love, like it, is without end. Babs!" he exclaimed, "oh, Babs, my darling!——"

Dr. Stephens did not wait to hear more. Softly, as softly as he had opened it, he closed the door, and slunk down the staircase like a convicted felon. Outside he leant against the garden wall and endeavoured to pull together his shattered energies.

"Shouldn't I just like to dissect that fellow, that's all!" he muttered. "But, no, I wouldn't," he added, in the same breath. "She—she loves him, and, and—that" something."

S. Perry.

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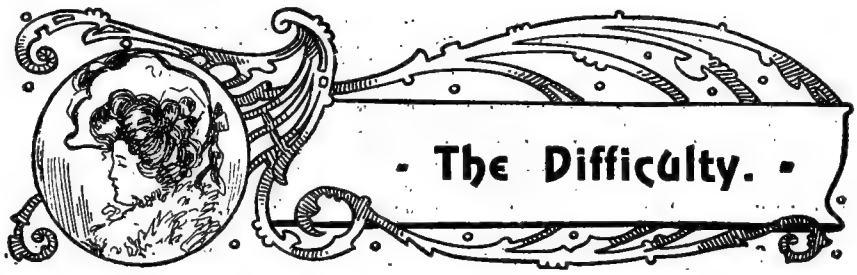

The Difficulty.

"You understand that I expect you to look after my three rooms, sweep and dust, and all that sort of thing?"

"Yes," remarked Mrs. Peterson; "I understand. The rooms suit me perfectly," she went on as they passed downstairs again, "and I shall begin to move to-morrow. It will be so nice to turn round and not always be running into somebody. And now Mr. Peterson's sister is living with us. Well, good-day. The things will begin to come after to-morrow. Good-day."

Theodore Foster stood looking after her a moment; then he went into the empty sitting-room and took the large "Apartments to Let" notice from the front window. He carried it up to his own room. "I hope it will be a long time before I have to see you again," he told it as he put it in his desk.

It was the first time for a month that he had felt really happy. During that time he had tried to get a tenant for his house, but had been unable to find a suitable one. It had been horribly lonely coming home at night to a cold, echoing house. But now he would have the Petersons there, and he looked forward to the day after to-morrow with joy. He used to know Joe Peterson, but he supposed he wouldn't see much of him, as Joe was away from home all the week. There were the children, too. He was fond of children, even if he was an old bachelor. Then he remembered that the children must be nearly grown up by this time. Well, young people were almost as good as children.

It was the next day, while he was out taking his constitutional, that his friend Everson saw him and crossed the street to talk to him. "So you have got the Petersons?" he said, after they had walked some distance together. "Well, there's only one thing about them that you won't like."

"What is that?" questioned Mr. Foster.

"Their piano."

"Oh, I don't mind piano practice as some do," said Theodore easily. "In fact, I rather like it."

"You haven't lived with the Petersons yet," said Everson sententiously. "You wait a little. It's a terribly old piano. I could get more music out of a brass kettle and tin pans. It's all out of tune, too; and, worst of all, they keep banging away on it all the time. It's something awful! There are three girls who take lessons, and they keep the old thing going about nine hours a day."

Theodore's face had lengthened during this description. "What makes them keep such an antiquity?" he asked.

"Well, you see, they're rather poor, and they can't afford a new one."

Theodore walked moodily along after his friend had left him. Then suddenly his face brightened. "I can arrange matters all right," he said, and went on more briskly.

The next morning there was considerable grumbling from the two men who moved the Petersons' belongings because Mr. Theodore Foster insisted on helping them.

He was especially troublesome about the placing of the piano. He insisted on having it on the very end of the load, and tied it with his own hands. When the horses started, he trotted along beside it, and they reached the house at the same time.

It was a raw morning, and the men were putting blankets on the horses, when suddenly there came a jangling crash. They hurried to the back of the van and found Theodore looking in horror and dismay at the very badly smashed piano.

"It's all my fault" was all he managed to say before a torrent of abuse and oaths loud and deep overwhelmed him.

Theodore went and told Mrs. Peterson about the accident, and after he had gone a loud wail rose from the three girls, but when the household effects were moved in and the Petersons themselves went to their new home, there, in the drawing-room, was a beautiful, brand-new piano awaiting them.

They all stood in the doorway and stared in amazement.

"Mr. Foster had it sent," Aunt Sarah Peterson explained. She had been there attending to that end of the moving. "He said that as it was due to his carelessness that the other was wrecked, he should take the liberty of replacing it by this one."

Maud, the eldest girl, went and tried the instrument. "Isn't it beautiful?" she cried rapturously.

Time went on, and the girls practised diligently. Their aunt also took advantage of the chance to play, so that Theodore had all the music he wanted.

One day Theodore asked Maud to go with him to the piano shop.

"I want you to try them all," he said, "and see if there is one you like better than the one at home."

Maud tried them. "No," she declared, "there isn't one so nice."

"By the way, won't you play that new waltz for me?"

She seated herself at the nearest instrument and began to play. When she had finished she looked round, but Theodore was not beside her as she had supposed. Instead she saw him at the far end of the room, coming towards her with a piece of paper in his hand. When he reached her he passed her the paper. "A birthday present, my dear. I believe it is your birthday to-day."

Maud looked at the paper blankly. Then it dawned upon her that it was a receipt for the piano at home, made out in her name. Maud would never tell her sisters what she did at that moment, but when she came home and told them about it they all declared that Mr. Foster was a "dear."

"Don't you think it would be better for you to go out of doors more, Miss Sarah?" Theodore asked her one day. "I would be greatly honoured if you would accompany me on my daily walks. It is rather tedious going alone."

And so it became the custom for the old bachelor and the maiden aunt to walk out every day together.

But after a year of this Miss Sarah told him one day that she was going away for a six months' visit.

Theodore was filled with consternation at this and begged her to reconsider. He pleaded so earnestly and eloquently that she finally promised to stay away only two weeks, and when she came back to "name the day."

That was the longest walk they had taken, and towards the end of it Theodore said: "My dear, there is something I have wanted to tell you ever since I have known you. It is about the piano."

"I don't think you will have to tell me now," she said. "I have known it all the time. I saw you do it."

"Saw me do it? Do what?"

"Cut the rope."

He stood still and looked at her.

"I was at the window. I had come over to see the things, you know, and saw you take out your knife, step up to the hub of the wheel and cut the rope."

"And you never told?"

"No: you see," she said confusedly, her colour rising, "it flashed upon me at once what you did it for—that old piano was an instrument of torture—and that was the beginning of the—of the end, I think."

"I don't understand what you mean by the end."

She turned a radiant glance upon him. "Why, don't you see—to-day!"

P. Trussler.

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A HAPPY MISTAKE.

Showing how Violet Burroughs Accepted Her Lover.

JACK BARRY walked out of the hotel the picture of physical health and strength. He was handsome, too, and had he been rich the girl who could have refused his proffered hand would have been a curiosity. But, alas! Like most of his comrades he was poor. Not that he cared in the least, as he would have said himself, but he ascribed the one back-handed slap that he had ever received from Dame Fortune to his poverty—that is, to his income of £300 a year and no more. Of course it was a girl that did it. Young cavalry officers take nothing seriously except girls—and unfortunately very few girls take young cavalry officers seriously. It is one thing to flirt and dance with a handsome fellow in a fine uniform, and quite another to marry one and live in comparative poverty.

Jack had fallen in love with a girl almost before the ink on his commission was dry; he had danced attendance on her a whole summer at the seaside, and he had proposed and been quietly but firmly rejected.

The rejection was a terrible blow. He was convinced that the girl was in love with him. He rather thought that he was treating her with unusual fairness by being actually in love with her. She tumbled him off a very lofty perch with a little half-whispered "No." He hardly believed his own ears when she said it. Then he suddenly discovered how much he really did love her. He could not live without her—no, not a day. He meditated suicide all one night, resolved to commit it, unfortunately went to sleep in his chair, woke up with an enormous appetite, ate a good breakfast, and—changed his mind. He concluded that it would be much more romantic, and would make her feel worse, to waste his life and then some day to tell her it was all his fault. Ah! she would understand it all then.

After joining his regiment, however, Jack did not get an opportunity to waste his life. He was ordered abroad, and there was plenty of work to do, and he spent two years away from England, home and beauty. It was a good thing for him. He had no opportunity to spend his income, and therefore was obliged to save it, so that at the end of that time, when he had managed to get a three months' leave of absence, he had a little money and a good deal of common sense. He had developed. Instead of wasting his life, he found that he was full of healthy ambition, and while he could not forget that girl he had grimly resolved to get along without her. He did propose to do one thing, however, and that was to get to England as fast as ever he could, call on her, and let her know how well he was getting along without her. He reached the hotel at noon—he was just leaving the hotel to call on her at night.

She lived in Kensington. It was a delightful September night, with a full moon, and he walked down to the house, repeating on the way, a dozen times or more, the question, "Is Miss Burroughs at home?" so that his voice would not tremble the slightest particle even before the servant. His voice did not tremble either when the critical moment arrived, but he was a little astonished that the servant should usher him into the drawing-room without saying a word or even asking for his card. He was still more astonished to find that there was no light in the room save the stream of moonlight that slanted in at the windows. Astonishment was not the word for the occasion when he saw Violet Burroughs herself leaning on the sill of the window in the moonlight; and he almost gasped when she said in the most matter-of-fact way: "I knew you would come back!"

"Did you?" he exclaimed, sinking uninvited into a chair.

"Yes," she repeated. Then he noticed that she was crying.

"I hope that I don't intrude—perhaps I had better call again?"

She paid no attention to the suggestion, but still looking out of the window said: "Your voice has changed already a great deal."

"Yes, I suppose it has," he answered.

"You said you would be a changed man, but I did not suppose it would affect you so soon," she continued. "Oh, it is dreadful, isn't it?"

"My voice? I did not know that it was. I'll have it trained——"

"How can you jest? You know I mean this affair of ours—your love for me."

"Oh!"

"When you jest you make me feel that you are desperate. You will not commit suicide, will you? Promise me that you won't!"

The conversation was becoming rather rapid. Jack had called for the purpose of saying not a word concerning the old love that he had so manfully buried—for the purpose, too, of letting her see how well he had buried it, and how nicely he was getting along without her after all; and here she was plunging into it herself in a most unladylike manner, and dragging him along with her. More than that, she was rapidly opening the old wounds; and still more, she was resurrecting the old love. Why was she crying? Why did she expect him? How did she even know he was in town?

She must have expected him to call that very evening, else she would not be acting in this—to say the least—highly informal manner. But the thing that pleased him most was the fact that the whole thing was so fresh in her mind. It was possible that even now she might be won by him. He answered her last question.

"I did think of suicide—but I gave the idea up. There is too much in life to live for—there are too many changes

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of luck—too many opportunities to win in the end what was refused in the beginning——"

"Oh, no—no—do not think that you can ever win my love!"

"But, Miss Burroughs, I did not come here to win your love. You may remember that when we parted you assured me that you had a great respect for me, that you hoped you would see me often, in fact—er—I believe you said—er—that you would be a sister to me, or something like that—and I had no intention of compelling you to receive any unwelcome attentions."

"But you love me?"

"Well, I—er—I——"

"You must love me!"

"It shall be just as you say."

"I do not mean that, either. You would not have acted as you did unless you loved me."

"Well, I'll acknowledge"—he was getting just a little tender now—"that I do love you. I've tried to forget you, but I couldn't——"

"You haven't had a very long time to try to forget."

"It has seemed very long indeed to me."

"Yes, it has to me, too. I have been sitting here at this window crying ever since."

Barry nearly jumped. Sitting there crying ever since! Was it possible, or was the girl crazy? He never solved the problem. The girl continued:

"But I do not love you, and no matter what papa and mamma say I will never marry you. I have never told you why. I'll tell you now. I love another."

"Another?"

"Yes, and have for a long time—and I never expect to see him again, for I sent him away, and he may be dead now, poor fellow. I thought it would be fun to reject him, and I really didn't know how much I cared for him—and then I thought he wouldn't take 'No' for an answer. But, oh, he did, and I have been the most miserable girl in the world ever since. I love him—I love him—and he ought to have sense enough to know it!" She broke into sobs, burying her head, a quivering mass of disordered hair, in her hands.

"Then it has always been quite a hopeless case, so far as I am concerned.?"

"Yes."

"Well, let me show you how bravely I can stand it. Let me be a brother to you. Tell me who he is. I'll go to him and bring him back to you. I have an idea that he will be very glad to come, whoever he is."

"No," with a shake of the head, "he is too proud. He will never come back to me."

"Tell me who he is."

"You know him."

"Well?"

"He is Jack Barry, a lieutenant in the 71st Lancers. You remember him at the seaside two years ago?"

Jack pinched himself to discover whether he was really awake or dreaming. He felt like shouting, but concluded that it wouldn't be quite the correct thing. He wanted to laugh with happiness, but he couldn't laugh while she was crying there in the corner. He saw it all now. She thought she was talking to some other fellow whom she had refused just before. Finally he said:

"Yes, I know him very well, but he, too, has changed."

"In what way?" she asked anxiously.

"Well, his voice has changed, too."

"That's nothing. I don't care how he has changed, if he only loves me as he used to."

"He does—and, by-the-way, his voice is very much like mine now."

It was not the words he had used, but the tone of voice in which he had spoken them that gave her woman's intuition the spur. She looked quickly up. He was standing now where she could catch the outlines of his figure. She uttered a little exclamation, reached over to the wall, switched on the electric light, and—well, this is the end of my story.

Thomas Winthrop Hall.

THE NEW "HOUSE THAT JACK BUILT."

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———

Number four is now on sale, so, before it's too late, be up-to-date and purchase a copy for Sixpence.

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Her Experience.

Miss Greenleaf: "I have just been reading a book called 'How Men Propose.' What is your opinion on that subject?" Miss Yellowleaf: "That they don't."

Sought Advice at Proper Quarters.

He: "I am in love. Will you be my confidante?" She: "Certainly; I am at your service." He: "Well, would you advise me to propose to you?"

For Example.

Miss Flypp (coyly): "Do you believe that it's love that makes the world go round?" Mr. Staylate: "Indeed I do. Notice how soon midnight comes when I spend the evening with you."

His Choice.

"I don't know which is worse," muttered young Blunderheels at the swell reception, retreating to a corner, and wiping his perspiring brow; "but I believe I would rather be run over by a train than step on one."

Tit for Tat.

He (angrily): "Look at this bill. Four pounds for perfumery—for mere odours that fade away for ever." She (calmly): "They've gone to meet the smoke from the eight pounds' worth of cigars you have consumed during the last three months."

Of Course Not.

Little Johnny: "That young man who comes to see you must be pretty poor company. He hasn't any sense of humour." Sister: "Why do you think so?" Little Johnny: "I told him all about the funny way you rush about and bang doors when you get in a temper, and he didn't laugh a bit."

Sounded too Rough.

"Nellie," spoke the youth, with an air of confidence, "only say the word and you and I will sail together on the rough sea of life, bravely buffeting its waves, trimming our sails to meet the adverse winds that——" "Go, Geoffrey, go," interrupted the maiden. "The man who takes me on that journey must offer me a first-class passage on a steamer." Whereupon Geoffrey sailed out of her presence with a decided list to po t.

Settled Matters Easily.

They were at a picnic. "You see," he explained, as he showed her the wish-bone of a chicken at luncheon, "you take hold here and I'll take hold here. Then we must make a wish and pull; and, when it breaks, the one who has the bigger part of it will have his or her wish gratified." "But I don't know what to wish for," she protested. "Oh, you can think of something!" he said. "No, I can't," she replied; "I can't think of anything I want very much." "Well, I'll wish for you!" he exclaimed. "Will you really?" she asked. "Yes." "Well, then, there's no use troubling about the old wish-bone," she interrupted, with a glad smile; "you can have me!"

Cause for Satisfaction.

Ella: "I heard something horrid about you to-day." Stella: "I thought you looked pleased."

Ambiguous.

"How do you like my new hat, George?" "It is the dearest thing of the kind you ever had, love."

An Awkward Admission.

She (encouragingly): "Your step suits mine exactly, Mr. Robinson." He (nervously): "So delighted to hear you say so, Miss Sharpe! I know I'm such a wretched waltzer."

According to Custom.

First Poet: "I wrote Miss Starling a week ago, and sent her my love. I don't know why she has not returned it." Second Poet (absent-mindedly): "Did you inclose stamps for its return?"

He Thought Long and Deeply.

Said the married man who likes to be sympathised with: "My wife is never happy unless she has a grievance." "How happy she must be!" said the pretty girl, and then the married man grew strangely silent.

She was Pleased.

"Just one little kiss," he pleaded. "But only a little one," she said, relenting. "Of course," he replied. "How could I look for a big one from so small a mouth?" And after that he got as many as he wanted.

Rampant Curiosity.

Claribel: "You told me you were never going to write to young Hankinson again." Angie: "He's written me a dozen letters I haven't answered, but in his last one he left a page out, and I had to write and ask him what it was about."

Wanted an Interview.

She: "Ah, Count, you don't know how my love for you distresses my parents. I heard my father say this morning that he would give £10,000 if I could never see you again." The Count: "Ees your fazaire in hees offees now, you sink?"

Revenge, Sweet Revenge.

"No, Harold," said the sweet girl, "I can only be a sister to you." "Well, then," he savagely replied, as he heard a subdued chuckle, "as your brother, I shall claim the privilege of lying under the sofa while you make fools of the other fellows."

Fatal.

"Wasn't it brave of Chollie to rescue that child from drowning in the creek?" "Brave? The water wasn't more than four feet deep anywhere, and Chollie knew it." "Yes, but that was deep enough to utterly ruin the crease in his trousers."

Effectively Told.

Servant: "Oh, miss, that Mr. Borem is coming here again. There's no use telling him you're not at home, for he'll just push past me an' say he'll wait till you come back." Miss Beauty: "Then, for mercy's sake, tell him plainly that I'm engaged. Do it in such a way that he'll have to go." Servant: "Yes, miss." Mr. Borem (a minute later): "Is Miss Beauty at home?" Servant: "Yes, sir, but she is engaged; an' the feller she's engaged to is waitin' in the drawing-room for you with a stick." Mr. Borem went.

A Correct Diagnosis.

George: "Eh, you got engaged last night? Gus, my old, my dear friend, tell me how you did it!" Gus: "Really, I hardly know myself. Couldn't help it; just like falling downstairs. I was on the edge of a proposal, she gave me a push, and there I was—engaged." George: "Well, I haven't had any such experience. Every time I try to start my knees knock together, and my teeth chatter, and my tongue cleaves to the roof of my mouth. I've tried a dozen times to pop the question to Miss Horty, and got stuck every time." Gus: "And did she let you stick?" George: "Yes." Gus: "You are courting the wrong girl!"

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BAFFLING A DETECTIVE.

Showing How Edward Meredith almost Fell in Love with a Rogue.

It was a dull, rainy day, towards the end of September—one of those days when earth and sky alike are grey and dreary, and the raindrops pattering against the window sound like human sobs. The clock that hung against the wall pointed to the hour of three in the afternoon; and I was sitting in our little inner office, looking out at the expanse of dull, grey wall that formed my only prospect from the not over-clean window, and thinking. I had read every square inch of type in the newspapers.

I was musing about Gracie Elton, and wondering how long it would be before I should be able to marry her. Dear little Gracie, she was as sweet and as patient as it was in the nature of a woman to be; but I knew it was a hard life for her in that over-crowded milliners' work-room, day after day, and month after month, and I longed to set her free from the monotonous captivity. She was a pretty, blue-eyed girl of twenty, with a dimple in her chin, and the sweetest roses on her cheek that ever inspired the pen of a poet. I was no poet, yet I think I understood and appreciated all her womanly beauty as fully as if my heart's thoughts could shape themselves into verse. And it was of them I was thinking when the door opened, and Mr. Clenner came in.

Mr. Clenner was our "chief"—a dark, silent, little man, with square, stern mouth, and clouded, grey eyes, which appeared almost expressionless when they were turned full upon you, and yet which seemed to see everything at a glance. He sat down beside me.

"Meredith," he said, in a quiet, subdued tone that was natural to him; "didn't you say you were getting tired of doing nothing?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, I have something for you to do."

"What is it, sir?"

"Something that will bring you both credit and friends if you manage it skilfully. I had intended to go myself, but circumstances happened untowardly, and I shall send you instead."

Bending his head towards me, and speaking scarcely above a whisper, he told me the special business on which I was to be sent.

There had been, it seems, a series of very skilful forgeries lately committed, with a boldness and audacity that fairly seemed to set the authorities at defiance. For some time he had been in doubt as to the exact perpetrator of the crime; but, after much quiet investigation and casting hither and thither, he had detected the hidden spring—one Perley Mattison—who had skilfully eluded all pursuit, and was now somewhere in hiding in the north of England.

His whereabouts had been ascertained as nearly as possible, and it was for me to go quietly up and apprehend him before he should become aware of our knowledge of all his movements.

I sat listening to all the various details of our plan as they were sketched out by Mr. Clenner. The reward that had been privately offered was high; my heart leapt as I reflected how much nearer it would bring me to Gracie Elton, nor did the enterprise seem particularly difficult to accomplish.

"Do you think you can do it?" Mr. Clenner asked, after the whole thing had been laid before me.

"Yes, sir. When shall I start?"

"Now, within half-an-hour."

"So soon?"

"Yes; why not?"

I could think of no sufficient reason except one, which I did not care to communicate to my superior—the longing wish to see Gracie once more before I started.

"Just as you decide, Mr. Clenner, of course," I said rising. "If I take the night express, I shall be there early in the morning."

"Yes, and that is altogether the best plan. He will not remain long in any one place just at present, depend upon it, and what you have to do must be done at once."

All through the long night journey I mused upon the task that lay before me. The house to which I was directed was quite in the country, about half-a-mile beyond the village of Berwood, and was the residence of Mrs. Mattison, the mother of the audacious forger. If help was needed, I was fully authorised to call for it upon the constabulary authorities at Kerstead; but I expected to need no assistance.

The rosy dawn was just flushing the eastern sky when I alighted, stiff, weary and jaded, from the train.

"Can you direct me to Mrs. Mattison's place?" I asked of the sleepy station-master.

"Mattison—Mrs. Mattison; I don't know her, but I can tell you where she lives. Just you follow the main street of the village out about half-a-mile, and ye'll come to a wood, with a footpath running through it. Get over the stile, follow the footpath, and in a little while ye'll see a yellow house—the last place in the world where you'd expect to see a dwelling. That's where Mrs. Mattison lives."

I thanked my informant and set out at a brisk walk, carrying my travelling-bag in my hand. It was half-an-hour ere I diverged from the main street into a quiet and secluded road, or rather lane. The stile at the end of the footpath through the wood was quickly reached, and the little yellow house—a cream-coloured cottage, literally overgrown with honeysuckles—presently rewarded my search; and as I knocked at the door, a clock somewhere struck the hour of seven.

A decent-looking, elderly woman, in widow's weeds, came to the door.

"Is Mr. Mattison in—Mr. Perley Mattison?"

"No," she answered quickly, with, as I imagined, rather a confused look.

I did not believe her, and asked quietly, "When do you expect him home?"

"Not at present."

Apparently she expected me to go away; but, instead, I slipped into the passage.

"Mother," said a soft voice, at the head of the stairs, "who is it?"

And then, for the first time, I became aware that someone had been watching and listening to our colloquy from the head of the stairs—a young girl, dressed, like the mother, in deep black, with very brilliant eyes, and a profusion of jet-black curls.

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"Someone to see your brother."

She came half-way down the stairs, pushing back her curls with one hand, and looking at me with her wonderful eyes. Even then her beauty struck me as I stood gazing at her.

"Perley is not at home," she said, hurriedly. "He has gone away. We do not know when he will return."

Evidently this mother and daughter were in the secret of Mattison's villainy, and doing their best to screen him from its consequences. My heart bled for both of them; but it was no time to indulge in sentimental pity. Speaking as briefly as I could, I told them it was my duty to compel them to remain where they were while I searched the house.

Mrs. Mattison sat down, pale and trembling. Her daughter coloured high.

"Mother," she said, "why do you stand by and listen to such slanders? It is false! Let this man search the house if he will; my brother is as innocent as I am!"

No opposition was offered to my search. It was entirely fruitless, however; there was nowhere any trace of the missing man. Nevertheless, I resolved to remain there quietly, for a day or two, to see what a little waiting might bring forth.

The same afternoon Clara Mattison came in as I sat by the window, keeping a silent watch on all around.

"Mr. Meredith," she said, softly, "mother thinks I have been rude to you. She says it was not your fault, personally, that you were sent here on such a mistaken errand—and, perhaps, she is right. I am sorry if I have hurt your feelings."

The pretty, penitent way in which she spoke quite won my heart, and a few questions on my part seemed to unlock the hidden recesses of her confidence.

She talked at first shyly, but afterwards, with more assurance, of herself, her absent brother, and her mother, giving me a thousand little family details, which I almost dreaded to hear.

This twilight talk was one of the pleasantest episodes of my by no means universally pleasant life, and I was not a little annoyed when it was broken in upon by the arrival of the constables from Kerstead, who were to watch through the night.

At the sound of their footsteps, Clara rose up and sat down again, confused and frightened.

"Oh, Mr. Meredith, those men——"

"Be easy, Miss Mattison," I said; "you shall in no way be annoyed by them. Your privacy shall not be broken in upon, believe me."

"I know I am silly," faltered Clara; "but, oh, it seems so dreadful!"

My orders to the men were simple and succinct. I stationed them as seemed best to me, and then returned to spend the evening with Miss Mattison. And when I was at length left alone, I could not help thinking—God forgive me—how much more winning and graceful she was than poor Gracie Elton.

At last an answer came to my report to Mr. Clenner. It was short, and to the purpose:

Come back. You are only losing time. If the bird has flown, we must look elsewhere for him.

I read the missive with a pang. Clara Mattison's cheek deepened in colour as I announced my departure to her.

"You have been far kinder than we dared to hope, Mr. Meredith," she said, as I held her hand in mine.

"You will think of me sometimes, Clara?"

The reader will easily perceive from this how our intimacy had progressed. She smiled, hung her head, and, taking a pair of scissors from the table, severed one bright, black curl from the abundant tresses that hung over her forehead.

"Keep this, Mr. Meredith, in memory of me."

Was I foolish to press the jetty ringlet to my lips ere I laid it closely against my heart? Clara evidently thought I was, for she laughed, but did not seem displeased.

Mr. Clenner appeared to be a good deal annoyed when I got back to town—rather an unreasonable thing on his part, for I certainly did all that man could do under the circumstances.

"We have been mistaken all the way through, it seems," he said, biting his lip. "Strange—very strange. I never was mistaken before in my calculations. Well, we must try again."

I went to Gracie Elton's that night. She received me with a sweet, shy gladness of welcome, that should have made me the happiest man in the world; but it did not. Clara Mattison's dark beauty seemed to stand between me and her like a visible barrier. When I took my leave, there were tears in her eyes.

"Gracie, you are crying."

"Because you are changed, Edward. You do not love me as well as you did."

"Gracie, what nonsense!"

I was vexed with her, simply because I knew her accusation was true. But I kissed her once more, and took my leave, moody and dissatisfied.

When I reached the office next morning, Mr. Clenner was not there.

"He went last night to Kerstead," said my fellow-detective.

"To Kerstead?"

I was seriously annoyed. Did Mr. Clenner doubt the accuracy of my reports? Or did he imagine that I was unable to institute a thorough and complete investigation.

"It's very strange," I mused aloud.

Jones laughed.

"Well," he said, "you know Clenner has a strange way of doing things. Depend upon it, he has good reasons for his conduct."

I was sitting at my desk two days subsequently, when the door glided noiselessly open, and Clenner himself entered.

"You are back again, sir? And what luck?"

"The best."

"You don't mean to say you've got him?"

"I do mean to say it, Edward Meredith. I knew I could not be entirely mistaken. Perley Mattison is in the next room—half an hour from now he will be in prison."

"Where did you apprehend him."

"At home in his mother's house."

"But——"

"He was there all the time you remained there. Ned, my boy, you've made a blunder for once; but don't let it happen again."

"What do you mean, sir?"

For reply, he opened the door of the private inner room—his own special sanctum. A slight, boyish figure leant against the window, smoking a cigarette, with black curls tossed back from a marble-white brow, and brilliant eyes. He mockingly inclined his head, as I stared at him, with a motion not unfamiliar to me.

"Clara Mattison!"

"Yes," he said, in a soft, sarcastic voice, "Clara Mattison, or Perley Mattison, or whatever you choose to call me. Many thanks for your politeness, Detective Meredith; and if you would like another lock of hair——"

I turned away, burning scarlet, while Mr. Clenner closed the door.

"Never mind, my boy; it will be a lesson to you," he said, laughing. "He made a very pretty girl, but I am not at all susceptible."

What a double-dyed fool I had been! I had lost the reward—failed in the estimation of my fellow-officers—and behaved like a brute to poor Gracie—and all for what?

I went to Gracie, and told her the whole story; and, to my surprise, the dear, faithful little creature loved me just as well as ever.

"I won't be jealous of Perley Mattison, Edward," she said, smiling, "whatever I might be of his sister. And, dearest, don't be discouraged. I'll wait as long as you please and you will be a second Mr. Clenner yet."

She was determined to look on the bright side of things, this little Gracie of mine! But I felt the mortification none the less keenly; although, as Mr. Clenner said, it would undoubtedly prove a good lesson to me.

Frederick Coomber.

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A Story of Love and Crime.

By ARNOLD BENNETT.

TWENTY-FOURTH CHAPTER.

The Bottle of Wine.

ALTHOUGH Racksole had now been twice worsted in a contest of wits within the precincts of the Grand Babylon, once by Rocco and once by Jules, he could not fairly blame himself for the present miscarriage of his plans—a miscarriage due to the meddlesomeness of an extraneous person, combined with pure ill-fortune. He did not, therefore, permit the accident to interfere with his sleep that night.

On the following day he sought out Prince Aribert, between whom and himself there now existed a feeling of unmistakable, frank friendship, and disclosed to him the happenings of the previous night, and particularly the tampering with the bottle of Romanée-Conti.

"I believe you dined with Prince Eugen last night?"

"I did. And, curiously enough, we had a bottle of Romanée-Conti, an admirable wine, of which Eugen is passionately fond."

"And you will dine with him to-night?"

"Most probably. To-day will, I fear, be our last day here. Eugen wishes to return to Posen early to-morrow."

"Has it struck you, Prince," said Racksole, "that if Jules had succeeded in poisoning your nephew, he would probably have succeeded also in poisoning you?"

"I had not thought of it," laughed Aribert, "but it would seem so. It appears that so long as he brings down his particular quarry, Jules is careless of anything else that may be accidentally involved in the destruction. However, we need have no fear on that score now. You know the bottle, and you can destroy it at once."

"But I do not propose to destroy it," said Racksole calmly. "If Prince Eugen asks for Romanée-Conti to be served to-night, as he probably will, I propose that that precise bottle shall be served to him—and to you."

"Then you would poison us in spite of ourselves?"

"Scarcely," Racksole smiled. "My notion is to discover the accomplices within the hotel. I have already inquired as to the wine-clerk, Hubbard. Now, does it not occur to you as extraordinary that on this particular day Mr. Hubbard should be ill in bed? Hubbard, I am informed, is suffering from an attack of stomach poisoning, which has supervened during the night. He says that he does not know what can have caused it. His place in the wine cellars will be taken to-day by his assistant, a mere youth, but to all appearances a fairly smart youth. I need not say that we shall keep an eye on that youth."

"One moment," Prince Aribert interrupted. "I do not quite understand how you think the poisoning was to have been effected."

"The bottle is now under examination by an expert, who has instructions to remove as little as possible of the stuff which Jules put on the rim of the mouth of it. It will be secretly replaced in its bin during the day. My idea is that by the mere action of pouring out the wine takes up some of the poison, which I deem to be very strong, and thus becomes fatal as it enters the glass."

"But surely the servant in attendance would wipe the mouth of the bottle?"

"Very carelessly, perhaps. And, moreover, he would be extremely unlikely to wipe off all the stuff; some of it has been ingeniously placed just on the inside edge of the rim. Besides, suppose he forgot to wipe the bottle?"

"Prince Eugen is always served at dinner by Hans. It is an honour which the faithful old fellow reserves for himself."

"But suppose Hans——" Racksole stopped.

"Hans an accomplice! My dear Racksole, the suggestion is wildly impossible."

That night Prince Aribert dined with his august nephew in the superb dining-room of the Royal apartments. Hans served, the dishes being brought to the door by other servants, Aribert found his nephew despondent and taciturn. On the previous day, when, after the futile interview with Sampson Levi, Prince Eugen had despairingly threatened to commit suicide, in such a manner as to make it "look like an accident," Aribert had compelled him to give his word of honour not to do so.

"What wine will your Royal Highness take?" asked old Hans in his soothing tones, when the soup was served.

"Sherry," was Prince Eugen's curt order.

"And Romanée-Conti afterwards?" said Hans. Aribert looked up quickly.

"No, not to-night. I'll try Sillery to-night," said Prince Eugen.

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Eugen's body had slipped limply forward; his arms hung straight and lifeless; his eyes were closed.

"I think I'll have Romanée-Conti, Hans, after all," he said, later. "It suits me better than champagne."

The famous and unsurpassable Burgundy was served with the roast. Old Hans brought it tenderly in its wicker cradle, inserted the corkscrew with mathematical precision, and drew the cork, which he offered for his master's inspection. Eugen nodded, and told him to put it down.

Aribert watched with intense interest. He could not for an instant believe that Hans was not the very soul of fidelity, and yet, despite himself, Racksole's words had caused him a certain uneasiness. At that moment Prince Eugen murmured across the table:

"Aribert, I withdraw my promise. Observe that, I withdraw it."

Aribert shook his head emphatically, without removing his gaze from Hans. The white-haired servant perfunctorily dusted his napkin round the neck of the bottle of Romanée-Conti, and poured out a glass. Aribert trembled from head to foot.

Eugen took up the glass and held it to the light.

"Don't drink it," said Aribert very quietly. "It is poisoned."

"Poisoned!" exclaimed Prince Eugen.

"Poisoned, sire!" exclaimed old Hans, with an air of profound amazement and concern, and he seized the glass.

"Impossible, sire. I myself opened the bottle. No one else has touched it, and the cork was perfect."

"I tell you it is poisoned," Aribert repeated.

"Your Highness will pardon an old man," said Hans, "but to say that this wine is poison is to say that I am a murderer. I will prove to you that it is not poisoned. I will drink it."

And he raised the glass to his trembling lips. In that moment Aribert saw that old Hans, at any rate, was not an accomplice of Jules. Springing up from his seat, he knocked the glass from the aged servitor's hands, and the fragments of it fell with a light tinkling crash partly on the table and partly on the floor. The Prince and the servant gazed at one another in a distressing and terrible silence. There was a slight noise, and Aribert looked aside. He saw that Eugen's body had slipped forward limply over the left arm of his chair; the Prince's arms hung straight and lifeless; his eyes were closed; he was unconscious.

"Hans!" murmured Aribert. "Hans! What is this?"

TWENTY-FIFTH CHAPTER.

The Steam Launch.

Mr. Tom Jackson's notion of making good his escape from the hotel by means of a steam launch was an excellent one, so far as it went, but Theodore Racksole, for his part, did not consider that it went quite far enough. Theodore Racksole opined, with peculiar glee, that he now had a tangible and definite clue for the catching of the Grand Babylon's ex-waiter. He knew nothing of the Port of London, but he happened to know a good deal of the far more complicated, though somewhat smaller, Port of New York, and he felt sure there ought to be no extraordinary difficulty in getting hold of Jules' steam launch. To those who are not thoroughly familiar with it the River Thames and its docks, from London Bridge to Gravesend, seem a vast and uncharted wilderness of craft—a wilderness in which it would be perfectly easy to hide even a three-master successfully. To such people the idea of looking for a small steam launch on the river would be about equivalent to the idea of looking for a needle in a bundle of hay.

But the fact is, there are hundreds of men between St. Katherine's Wharf and Blackwall who literally know the Thames as the suburban householder knows his back-garden—who can recognise thousands of ships and put a name to them at a distance of half a mile, who are informed as to every movement of vessels on the great stream, who know all the captains, all the engineers, all the lightermen, all the pilots, all the licensed watermen and all the unlicensed scoundrels from the Tower to Gravesend, and a lot further. By these experts of the Thames the slightest unusual event on the water is noticed and discussed—a wherry cannot change hands but they will guess shrewdly upon the price paid and the intentions of the new owner with regard to it. They have a habit of watching the river for the mere interest of the sight, and they talk about everything like housewives gathered of an evening round the cottage door. If the first

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mate of a Castle Liner gets the sack they will be able to tell you what he said to the captain, what the old man said to him, and what both said to the Board, and having finished off that affair they will cheerfully turn to discussing whether Bill Stevens sank his barge outside the West India No. 2 by accident or on purpose.

Theodore Racksole had no satisfactory means of identifying the steam launch which carried away Mr. Tom Jackson. The sky had clouded over soon after midnight, and there was also a slight mist, and he had only been able to make out that it was a low craft, about sixty feet long, probably painted black. He had personally kept a watch all through the night on vessels going up-stream, and during the next morning he had a man to take his place who warned him whenever a steam launch went towards Westminster. At noon, after his conversation with Prince Aribert, he went down the river in a hired row-boat as far as the Customs House, and poked about everywhere in search of any vessel which could by any possibility be the one he was in search of. But he found nothing. He was, therefore, tolerably sure that the mysterious launch lay somewhere below the Customs House. At the Customs House stairs he landed, and asked for a very high official—an official inferior only to a Commissioner—whom he had entertained once in New York, and who had met him in London on business at Lloyd's. In the large but dingy office of this great man a long conversation took place—a conversation in which Racksole had to exercise a certain amount of persuasive power, and which ultimately ended in the high official ringing his bell.

"Desire Mr. Hazell—room No. 332—to speak to me," said the official to the boy who answered the summons, and then, turning to Racksole: "I need hardly repeat, my dear Mr. Racksole, that this is strictly unofficial."

"Agreed, of course," said Racksole.

Mr. Hazell entered. He was a young man of about thirty, dressed in blue serge, with a pale, keen face, a brown moustache and a rather handsome brown beard.

"Mr. Hazell," said the high official, "let me introduce you to Mr. Theodore Racksole—you will doubtless be familiar with his name. Mr. Hazell," he went on to Racksole, "is one of our outdoor staff—what we call an examining officer. Just now he is doing night duty. He has a boat on the river and a couple of men, and the right to board and examine any craft whatever. What Mr. Hazell and his crew don't know about the Thames between here and Gravesend isn't knowledge."

"Glad to meet you, sir," said Racksole simply, and they shook hands. Racksole observed with satisfaction that Mr. Hazell was entirely at his ease.

"Now, Hazell," the high official continued, "Mr. Racksole wants you to help in a little private expedition on the river to-night. I will give you a night's leave. I sent for you partly because I thought you would enjoy the affair, and partly because I think I can rely on you to regard it as entirely unofficial, and not to talk about it. You understand? I dare say you will have no cause to regret having obliged Mr. Racksole."

"I think I grasp the situation," said Hazell, with a slight smile.

"And, by-the-way," added the high official, "although the business is unofficial, it might be well if you wore your official overcoat. See?"

"Decidedly," said Hazell; "I should have done so in any case."

"And now, Mr. Hazell," said Racksole, "will you do me the pleasure of lunching with me? If you agree, I should like to lunch at the place you usually frequent."

So it came to pass that Theodore Racksole and George Hazell, outdoor clerk in the Customs, lunched together at "Thomas' Chop House," in the city of London, upon mutton-chops and coffee. The millionaire soon discovered that he had got hold of a keen-witted man and a person of much insight.

"Tell me," said Hazell, when they had reached the cigarette stage, "are the magazine writers anything like correct?"

"What do you mean?" asked Racksole, mystified.

"Well, you're a millionaire—'one of the best,' I believe. One often sees articles on, and interviews with millionaires, which describe their private railroad cars, their steam yachts on the Hudson, their marble stables, and so on, and so on. Do you happen to have those things?"

"I have a private car on the New York Central, and I have a two thousand ton schooner-yacht—though it isn't on the Hudson. It happens just now to be on East River. And I am bound to admit that the stables of my uptown place are fitted with marble." Racksole laughed.

"Ah!" said Hazell. "Now I can believe that I am lunching with a millionaire. It's strange how facts like those—unimportant in themselves—appeal to the imagination. You seem to me a real millionaire now. You've given me some personal information; I'll give you some in return. I earn three hundred a year, and perhaps sixty pounds a year extra for overtime. I live by myself in two rooms in Muscovy Court. I've as much money as I need, and I always do exactly what I like outside office. As regards the office, I do as little work as I can, on principle—it's a fight between us and the Commissioners who shall get the best. They try to do us down, and we try to do them down—it's pretty even on the whole. All's fair in war, you know, and there ain't no ten commandments in a Government office."

Racksole laughed. "Can you get off this afternoon?" he asked.

"Certainly," said Howell; "I'll get one of my pals to sign on for me, and then I shall be free."

"Well," said Racksole, "I should like you to come down with me to the Grand Babylon. Then we can talk over my little affair at length. And may we go on your boat? I want to meet your crew."

How Jules is captured will be related in our next number.

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"That will be all right," Hazell remarked. "My two men are the idlest, most soul-less chaps you ever saw. They eat too much, and they have an enormous appetite for beer; but they know the river, and they know their business, and they will do anything within the fair game if they are paid for it, and aren't asked to hurry."

That night, just after dark, Theodore Racksole embarked with his new friend George Hazell in one of the black-painted Customs wherries, manned by a crew of two men—both the latter freemen of the river, a distinction which carries with it certain privileges unfamiliar to the mere landsman. It was a cloudy and oppressive evening, not a star showing to illumine the slow tide, now just past its flood. The vast forms of steamers at anchor—chiefly those of the General Steam Navigation and the Aberdeen Line—heaved themselves high out of the water, straining sluggishly at their mooring buoys. On either side the naked walls of warehouses rose like grey precipices from the stream, holding forth quaint arms of steam-cranes. To the west the Tower Bridge spanned the river with its formidable arch, and above that its suspended footpath—a hundred and fifty feet from earth. Down towards the East and the Pool of London a forest of funnels and masts were dimly outlined against the sinister sky. Huge barges, each steered by a single man at the end of a pair of giant oars, lumbered and swirled downstream at all angles. Occasionally a tug snorted busily past, flashing its red and green signals and dragging an unwieldy tail of barges in its wake. Then a Margate passenger steamer, its electric lights gleaming from every porthole, swerved round to anchor, with its load of two thousand fatigued excursionists. Over everything brooded an air of mystery—a spirit and feeling of strangeness, remoteness, and the inexplicable. As the broad, flat little boat bobbed its way under the shadow of enormous hulks, beneath stretched hawsers, and past buoys covered with green slime, Racksole could scarcely believe that he was in the very heart of London—the most prosaic city in the world. He had a queer idea that almost anything might happen in this seeming waste of waters at this weird hour of ten o'clock. It appeared incredible to him that only a mile or two away people were sitting in theatres applauding farces, and that at Cannon Street Station, a few yards off, other people were calmly taking the train to various highly-respectable suburbs whose names he was gradually learning. He had the uplifting sensation of being in another world which comes to us sometimes amid surroundings violently different from our usual surroundings. The most ordinary noises—of men calling, of a chain running through a slot, of a distant sirene—translated themselves to his ears into terrible and haunting sounds, full of portentous significance. He looked over the side of the boat into the brown water, and asked himself what frightful secrets lay hidden in its depth. Then he put his hand into his hip-pocket and touched the stock of his Colt revolver—that familiar substance comforted him.

The oarsmen had instructions to drop slowly down to the Pool, as the wide reach below the Tower is called. These two men had not been previously informed of the precise object of the expedition, but now that they were safely afloat Hazell judged it expedient to give them some notion of it. "We expect to come across a rather suspicious steam launch," he said. "My friend here is very anxious to get a sight of her, and until he has seen her nothing definite can be done."

"What sort of a craft is she, sir?" asked the stroke oar, a fat-faced man who seemed absolutely incapable of any serious exertion.

"I don't know," Racksole replied; "but as near as I can judge, she's about sixty feet in length, and painted black. I fancy I shall recognise her when I see her."

"Not much to go by, that," exclaimed the other man curtly. But he said no more. He, as well as his mate, had received from Theodore Racksole one English sovereign as a kind of preliminary fee, and an English sovereign will do a lot towards silencing the natural sarcastic tendencies and free speech of a Thames waterman.

"There's one thing I noticed," said Racksole suddenly, "and I forgot to tell you of it, Mr. Hazell. Her screw seemed to move with a rather irregular, lame sort of beat."

Both watermen burst into a laugh.

"Oh," said the fat rower, "I know what you're after, sir—it's Jack Everett's launch, commonly called *Squirm*. She's got a four-bladed propeller, and one blade is broken off short."

"Ay, that's it, sure enough," agreed the man in the bows. "And if it's her you want, I seed her lying up against Cherry Gardens Pier this very morning."

"Let us go to Cherry Gardens Pier by all means, as soon as possible," Racksole said, and the boat swung across stream and then began to creep down by the right bank, feeling its way past wharves, many of which, even at that hour, were still busy with cranes, that descended empty into the bellies of ships and came up full. As the two watermen gingerly manœuvred the boat on the ebbing tide, Hazell explained to the millionaire that the *Squirm* was one of the most notorious craft on the river. It appeared that when anyone had a nefarious or underhand scheme afoot which necessitated river work Everett's launch was always available for a suitable monetary consideration. The *Squirm* had got itself into a thousand scrapes, and out of those scrapes again with safety, if not precisely with honour. The river police kept a watchful eye on it, and the chief marvel about the whole thing was that old Everett, the owner, had never yet been seriously compromised in any illegal escapade. Not once had the officer of the law been able to prove anything definite against the proprietor of the *Squirm*, though several of its quondam hirers were at that very moment in various of His Majesty's prisons throughout the country. Latterly, however, the launch, with its damaged propeller, which Everett consistently refused to have repaired, had acquired an evil reputation, even among evil-doers, and this fraternity had gradually come to abandon it for less easily recognisable craft.

"Your friend, Mr. Tom Jackson," said Hazell to Racksole, "committed an error of discretion when he hired the *Squirm*. A scoundrel of his experience and calibre ought certainly to have known better than that. You cannot fail to get a clue now."

By this time the boat was approaching Cherry Gardens Pier, but unfortunately a thin night-fog had swept over the river, and objects could not be discerned with any clearness beyond a distance of thirty yards. As the Customs boat scraped down past the pier all its occupants strained eyes for a glimpse of the mysterious launch, but nothing could be seen of it. The boat continued to float idly down-stream, the men resting on their oars. Then they narrowly escaped bumping a large Norwegian sailing vessel at anchor with her stem pointing down-stream. This ship they passed on the port side. Just as they got clear of her bowsprit the fat man cried out excitedly, "There's her nose!" and he put the boat about and began to pull back against the tide. And surely the missing *Squirm* was comfortably anchored on the starboard quarter of the Norwegian ship, hidden neatly between the ship and the shore. The men pulled very quietly alongside.

"I'll board her to start with," said Hazell, whispering to Racksole. "I'll make out that I suspect they've got dutiable goods on board, and that will give me a chance to have a good look at her."

Dressed in his official overcoat and peaked cap, he stepped rather jauntily, as Racksole thought, on to the low deck of the launch. "Anyone aboard?" Racksole heard him cry out, and a woman's voice answered. "I'm a Customs examining officer, and I want to search the launch," Hazell shouted, and then disappeared down into the little saloon amidships, and Racksole heard no more. It seemed to the millionaire that Hazell had been gone hours, but at length he returned.

(Another long instalment next week.)

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Conducted by CYNTHIA.

[In this page are answered any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to Miss Cynthia Hamilton, c/o the Editor of SHORT STORIES.*]*

Wooing by Strategy.

So, "ALGY," you have fallen in love with a rich young lady in the neighbourhood. You dare not reveal the fact to her, as you are afraid she would instantly reject you. Besides, she has many suitors much better off in the world than yourself, and much more suitable to be her husband. How should I advise you to act in the matter?

* * * * * * *

Poor young men have before now succeeded in attracting rich girls, but not by showing themselves too ardent. I know a young man who succeeded in something like the following fashion:

He used to frequently meet the girl at other people's houses, but instead of always seeking her company, he deliberately avoided her, and paid lavish attentions to other girls far less attractive.

Meanwhile the rich girl came in for compliments and attentions from every other young man. My friend alone seemed to avoid her. In time, needless to say, the girl grew very curious and not a little jealous. Why should this one young man of all others alone avoid her? The result was that, on every possible occasion, the girl tried to attract the young man, never, however, seeming to succeed. His manner whenever he spoke to her was very cool and offhand. At the same time he managed to let the intimate friends of the rich girl know that all the time he was madly in love with her, but dared not show it, as he felt it would be dishonourable to make overtures to a girl whom he could never marry.

These tactics finally succeeded. The girl sought him out more and more, until she forced him to confess. Their engagement was announced not long after, and nobody could accuse the man of having angled for her, seeing that things were the exact reverse.

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The Ways of Courtship.

"How," writes "ALFRED," "can I gain the affections of a young lady whom I first knew eight years ago? We were friends then, but I went to live in the country for four years, and our friendship was lost from then until now. I like her very much, and would wish her to be my partner in life. Every time I meet her she always smiles at me, and never fails to speak."

* * * * *

Well, it does not look as though you should have much difficulty in winning her affections. Take advantage of the next time you meet her in the street and enter into conversation. Ask her if she would care to take a walk with you. Avoid putting on the airs of a lover altogether. Just be quite natural, and seem as though you want her companionship. When you have become on these friendly terms you will be able to practise the higher arts of courtship. But you should first serve the apprenticeship of a companion.

Misplaced Chivalry.

"CISSIE," is perplexed. She often travels to town with a young man, and they generally manage to meet at the booking office. He always persists on paying for "CISSIE'S" fare, and first class, and will never hear of her repaying him. Ought "CISSIE" to permit this, or is it etiquette for the young man to pay?

* * * * * * *

It is not only not etiquette, but very impolite of him. He places you under an obligation to him, to which he is not entitled. You should do one of two things. Either get to the booking office before he does, and buy yourself a third-class ticket, or tell the young man with a show of dignity that you positively object to his paying for your ticket, and that it is impolite of him to wish to do it. It would be entirely different if you were travelling as the companion of the man by his invitation, in which case it would be his duty to pay. But as you are travelling on your own account, you should be expected to pay for yourself. There is the young man's side of the question, and I might say a word about it. Perhaps he only pays for you out of a mistaken sense of chivalry. Well, he should avoid meeting you until after you have booked your ticket.

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A Relentless Girl.

"SOME months ago," writes "GUS," "I had an appointment to meet a young lady friend. On the day of the meeting I was taken suddenly ill, and could neither keep the appointment nor write and excuse myself. I was in bed for a week, and was ordered to go for a sea trip on recovering. When I returned, I called on the girl to explain the whole affair, but, though I knew she was in, I was told she was 'not at home.' I wrote and explained matters, but received no reply. When I met her in the street she cut me dead. Now, how can I act under such circumstances?"

* * * * * * *

If, "GUS," it was really not your fault that you did not explain your failure to keep the appointment before—if, in fact, you were really ill, then I think she is behaving in an extraordinary manner. A girl who refuses to accept such an excuse as yours could scarcely be the sort of girl for a young man to think of further cultivating. No doubt at the time she firmly convinced herself that you were offering her a slight. For weeks afterwards, receiving no word from you, she continued to think so, and probably grew to mortally despise and dislike you. When your explanation came it had no effect on her, as her feelings had already developed too strongly. Write once more, explaining the whole facts, and telling her that if she declines to accept them you will take it that she wishes the acquaintance at an end. She may then relent.

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In Her Fiancé's Absence.

"ROSIE B." is engaged to a man who has been abroad for over four years, and yet she has allowed another man to make love to her and kiss her and has promised to marry him. How girls can be so deceitful, is beyond me! If she loves him really better than the man she is engaged to, her only honourable course is to write and tell him that she is tired of waiting for him, and has decided to return all his gifts and letters, asking him to forgive the pain she has caused him. I should advise her to think well, however, before doing this, as a man who persistently makes love to a girl, knowing her to be engaged to another, is guilty of such underhand conduct as proves him to be the sort of man not greatly to be trusted. No wonder she feels dissatisfied at what she has done.

Cynthia

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MISCELLANEOUS ADVERTISEMENTS.

Will be inserted in this column at the rate of 6d. per line of 8 words or part thereof. All advertisements should be addressed to Advertisement Manager, "Short Stories," 17 Henrietta Street, London, W.C., 11 days prior to date of appearance.

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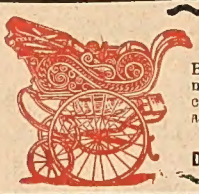

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